

**BUILDING BELIZE CITY:
AUTONOMY, SKILL AND MOBILITY AMONGST BELIZEAN
AND CENTRAL AMERICAN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS**

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In Loving Memory of Zofia Adamczyk, my *babcia*

Who let me turn on the recorder for the first time to capture old stories from Nazi
occupied Poland

Abstract

This thesis ethnographically explores the connections between labour and social life among workers informally employed in the small-scale construction industry of Belize City, the major urban centre of Belize on the Caribbean coast of Central America. It is grounded in participant observation among workers native to Belize as well as those born in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala who moved to Belize City because of civil wars in the 1970s, economic crisis and a recent rise in gang-related crime.

The thesis first addresses how work is organized according to builders' skills, and how skill acquisition is tied to the forms of sociality afforded by workers' relationship to waged work. Labourers who need to generate income by moving around the city and hustling are excluded from forms of sociality which permit skilled workers to stabilize their employment. Moreover, labour is implicated in personal and social worth, as becomes clear through an examination of male workers' status, reputations and multiple positionalities as kin.

Through ethnography both on and off the worksite, the research shows the entanglement of work, friendship and kinship ties, providing an analysis of the social, personal and economic differences these entail. The study foregrounds relationships in the lives of those born in the city as well as recently arrived migrants, while privileging subjective accounts which reveal multiple ways of experiencing the urban environment. This experience of working and living in Belize City is revealed through the future aspirations and ambitions that are conveyed through personal narratives. The thesis captures this plurality of perspectives through the idea of autonomy, a condition valued by workers which serves as a tool for understanding their circumstances at large and the relations between their work and daily life.

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(All pictures taken by the author)

Glossary

BK - Belizean Kriol

SE - Standard English

UNHCR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ILO – International Labour Organization

CDB - Caribbean Development Bank

GOB – Government of Belize

SIB – Statistical Institute of Belize

MAFFESD&I - Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment,
Sustainable Development and Immigration

BCCI - Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Introduction

Anthropologists have described Belize as intensely globalized (Wilk 1999, 1994, 2006, 2012; Gordon 2016; Anderson-Fye 2003; Medina 2010; Lundgren 1988)¹, even suggesting that it has jumped from 'pre-modern' to the 'post-modern' information age without any intervening phase of full-scale industrialisation (Sutherland 1998). Studies have mainly focused upon Belize's rural and ethnically² diverse population, and generally speaking, most research has been conducted outside of Belize City (Chibnik 1980; McClaurin 1996; Wiegand 1993). Regarding this country, commonly described as 'a Caribbean nation in Central America' (e.g. PUP 1989, in Medina 1997; Musa 2005; Palma 2011), there has been little written about its major urban Centre: Belize City. The literature on urban anthropology and ethnography highlights some of the dynamics of social life in big cities (Hannerz 1969; Whyte 1993; Bourgois 2003; Wacquant 2008; Vigil 2002; Venkatesh 1997). However, Belize is a small country (8,867 sq mi, about the size of Tuscany, Italy), and Belize City, despite being its largest city, remains small (around the same population as the town of Rugby, England). I was intrigued by the issue of scale: what would social life look like in a relatively small urban centre?

Belize, as with most of Central America and the Caribbean, is part of major migratory fluxes towards the USA. Also, as in the rest of Central America, some deportees from the United States have returned with 'gang culture', and helped establish it locally (see Rodgers, Muggah, and Stevenson 2009). The only study which talks at length about Belize City is concerned with precisely this issue (Gayle and Mortis 2010). However, in what follows I set

¹ Through tourism (Medina 2003), agricultural production (Medina 2004; Moberg 1997), fishing (Sutherland 1986), and NGO operations (Medina 2010).

² In particular, the Garifuna (Kerns 1983; Roessingh 2002; Moberg 1998, 1992; Jenkins 1983), the Maya (James B. Waldram 2015; Crooks 1997; Medina 1998; MacClusky 2001; Wilk 1991; M. Stone 1995; White, Healy, and Schwarcz 1993), and the Mennonites (Roessingh and Boersma 2011; Roessingh and Mol 2008; Roessingh and Nuijten 2012; Roessingh and Plasil 2006; Roessingh and Smits 2010).

out to explore how people who are not involved in crime make a living, following them between their informal economic activities and their experiences of family and street life in a small city.

Having arrived in Belize, I lived in a residential area mainly inhabited by people with limited resources, yet with a mixture of commercial activities, offices, and businesses. It seemed a good place strategically to overcome the problem, posed by the scarcity of data about Belize City, of defining which activities within the informal sector should be my object of investigation (cf. Goddard 1996, 4).

I rented a room from a Belizean-Honduran couple. A construction worker from El Salvador, two Honduran women just arrived in Belize (one waitressing in a bar, the other selling street-food), a Belizean lady from the West, and a Belizean police man also lived in this large, two-storey wooden house. My attention was soon drawn by the hustling taking place in the city, the talk about people who worked as labourers through a mode of finding work known as 'catch and kill', and the Central Americans involved in construction. I began my fieldwork in the small-scale construction industry: I discovered that I had found the right place from which to explore the connections between everyday life, the informal economy and the new themes of migration and labour which had emerged from fieldwork. This thesis thus asks how people with different skills, national origins and personal trajectories inhabit the same occupational sector and the same urban space.

Likewise, the thesis joins a renewed anthropological attention to work and labour (Kasimir and Carbonella 2014; Mollona, De Neve, and Parry 2009; Harvey and Krohn-Hansen 2018) by focusing on labour and its relationship with the city. In the pages that follow I focus closely on twelve workers, part of over 10,000 people estimated to be involved in craft and elementary

occupations in urban Belize District (SIB 2015a)³, I give close detail on the life and work of two of them in particular.

A central question I raise is this: how do people conceive of working in construction and living in Belize City, and how are labour and daily life connected in the process of making a living? With these questions I grapple with and encompass recent concerns with flexibility and precarity in the anthropological analysis of work and life conditions within what are referred to as 'neoliberal' and 'late capitalist' regimes (see Ganti 2014; Richland 2009; Hoffman, DeHart, and Collier 2011; Muehlebach 2013; Wacquant 2012; for the Caribbean see Birth 1996; Freeman 2007, 2014; Mantz 2007). So, this thesis tackles the issue of flexible production, casual labour and precarious lives from the perspective of work in the construction industry, a sector not subject to mechanization and Fordist assembly-line production, but one where workers are consistently exposed to irregular employment.

Thus, the thesis takes on the question of work, one increasingly explored in the Caribbean via perspectives from manufacturing (Yelvington 1995; Prentice 2015) and hi-tech industry (Freeman 2000), in doing so it foregrounds the lives of those who build and maintain the very physical structure of the city. Thus, it helps show how builder's work has been and continues to be indispensable to urban life.⁴

The thesis explores productive labour in terms of its relation to social life in the city, a long established object of enquiry in the anthropology of the region (Lieber 1981; Austin 1984; Brana-Shute 1989; Wardle 2000; Jaffe 2008). This research enters into dialogue with the anthropology of the Caribbean by taking Belize City as part of the region not in cultural terms, but as part of an *oikoumenê*, as Sidney Mintz (1996) framed the processual commonalities peculiar to the Caribbean. Thus, the thesis adopts an 'open'

³ These include women and the town of San Pedro.

⁴ A similar emphasis on the indispensability of work for city's life is encountered in the regional literature on trade (Katzin 1959b, 1959a; S. Mintz 2011; Ulysse 2007; Lewis 2015).

stance and avoids gatekeeping concepts (Trouillot 1992) which could limit the scope of analysis. Two key concepts—autonomy and dependency—are dealt with here not in terms of their cultural value (cf. Browne 2004), but as they are deployed and articulated by workers, hence as useful analytical tools that help account for the relations between work, social life and personal aspirations from the point of view of the people concerned.

Belize City

What is now Belize City was intermittently inhabited from the mid-to-late 17th century by British buccaneers turned lumberjacks until the mid-19th century when it evolved from a trading post into a port city (Everitt 1986). At that time, Belize Town had a population of 6,000 within a territory of 25,635 (Everitt 1986), which became a Crown Colony under the name of British Honduras in 1871. The city was the colony's political and economic capital, and its only urban centre throughout this period.

Belize City is a peninsula projecting into the Caribbean Sea. Urban development has consisted in reclaiming and filling land from mangrove swamps on both sides of the Haulover Creek which separates the city's 'Northside' from its 'Southside' (Map 3). Being at sea level, Belize City's architecture is characterized by a tradition of wooden buildings on stilts (cf. Meredith 1985), which are still being constructed and between which roads and small alleys intersect with a network of canals. Until 1946, Belize City still consisted of the areas inhabited in the mid-19th century (Map 5). In 1961, Hurricane Hattie had devastating effects and prompted the building of the new capital Belmopan in the interior, inaugurated in 1970 (see Everitt 1984), but this did not cause Belize City to lose its economic centrality nor its attraction for incoming migrant populations. Some areas in the South of the city were developed by the Government in order to provide shelter to the population affected by the Hurricane. The late 1970s decision of the government to embark upon substantial land reclamation saw a growing demand for a labour force. Central Americans fleeing civil wars filled that

need, while many Afro-Belizeans moved to the USA after the hurricane (Iyo 1998). As a result of the growing labour force and population, the Northside started to develop westward, in a mix of government schemes and real estate developments targeting affluent classes. The more densely populated Southside was also the object of government-led housing projects.

In 1981, Belize gained full independence as part of the Commonwealth of Nations, and its capital Belize City had a population of almost 40,000 (Everitt 1986). By the mid 1980s, Belize City still consisted of little more than the older city, but the building of the Belcan Bridge, the third bridge from the sea in 1970s initiated expansion (Map 6).

Foreign (mainly Panamanian) capital, government investment and new loans from private commercial banks, provided the financial basis for development towards the west, with housing for middle income and affluent sections of the population, as well as the government developments for the poor in some areas of the Northside and of the Southside. This led to a construction boom in between the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The city's expansion continued and continues today towards the west, pushing squatters who live in swamps in the same direction (see GOB and CDB 2011, 142). The 2010 census recorded just over 57,000 inhabitants (of which the 69% live in the Southside) out of a country-wide population of over 322,000 (SIB 2013), and in 2014 Belize City reached a population of around 70,000 (Pigou-Dennis and Grydehøj 2014). Roughly half of Belize City's population is under the age of 30, and 12% were born abroad, now equally distributed between the two sides of the city (SIB 2010).⁵

Belize City appears in only a small number of anthropological accounts (cf. Daugaard-Hansen 2005, 2010; Winters 2009). An example of recent work is the study conducted by the anthropologist Herbert Gayle, in which his

⁵ According to the 2010 census, this consisted of almost 7,000 individuals. This is lower than the almost 16% countrywide.

research team used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. The result was a report (Gayle and Mortis 2010) and then a book (Gayle, Hampton, and Mortis 2016) which brought to light the causes and consequences of young male participation in gangs.

This last issue obtained international attention when in 2008, an episode of the TV show 'Ross Kemp on Gangs', presented by the British actor, went on air and gave the world audience a sensationalised view of gang-related crime of Belize City. In 2014, The Guardian ranked Belize City as having the fourth highest homicide rate (Mead and Blason 2014). I myself felt this growing sense of what the city represented when at the beginning of fieldwork, I was suspected of being variously a CIA or FBI agent looking for wanted persons, an outlaw hiding in Belize, or a journalist in search of the same stories as the 'bald man' (Ross Kemp).

Rather differently, this thesis offers an outlook on Belize City which, without denying violence, foregrounds the issue of work and livelihoods for those who live here. Gayle, Hampton, and Mortis stress that gangs rely on the unemployed for their base, as well as: 'hustlers; labourers who are unskilled and must work for wages that cannot help mother or sibling or children; low skilled persons such as drivers, masons, carpenters, all of whom are victims of part-time or seasonal employment' (2016, 193). The thesis enquires into the work and lives of those who are at the bottom of the economic ladder, who live in Belize City, but none of those followed here is (or has chosen to be) involved in criminal activity. I explore the social relationships of economic relevance between city dwellers, workers, workers and contractors and their own relatives. At the same time, I analyse how status and personal worth result from men's multiple positionalities as workers and kinsman and the ways in which these are mutually constituted.

While the Southside, poorer and more dangerous, is often contrasted with the wealthier and safer Northside by the city dwellers, media and academics, areas of the Northside also contain urban poverty and are subjected to similar forms of violence and people move and know each other between the

two (Gayle, Hampton, and Mortis 2016). The urban dwellers I studied were highly mobile and this forced them to navigate urban dangers; certainly people here seem to move through their city more than is indicated by some recent studies of urban immobility in bigger cities (e.g. Wacquant 2008; Bourgois 2003). This thesis offers a view of workers in construction beyond urban spatial marginality (Gill 2001), merging anthropological insights on diversification of means of livelihood in the Caribbean and informal economy (Comitas 1973; Carnegie 1987a; Trouillot 1988; Harrison 1988; Browne 2004; Freeman 2000; Wardle 2002), through an ethnographic attention to movement. The thesis analyses how the city is experienced by different workers by merging an analysis of labour with a perspective centred on social relationships established through time in the urban environment.

Work in construction and migration

Ethnographic studies of construction work have generally focused on big firms with complex organization (Applebaum 1999; Thiel 2012; Paap 2006; Riemer 1980; Pink, Tutt, and Dainty 2013; see Moore 2013 for an exception). Here workers are more clearly defined by their trades, with foremen and managers occupying middle positions between tradesmen and company owners, who are involved in big scale projects. At the same time, formal employment and skill recognition feature in these accounts: workers are hired through unions (Paap 2006), there are hiring halls (Gill 2001), likewise processes of formal apprenticeship regulated by the state (Thiel 2012) and contractual arrangements between masters and apprentices and guild-like associations (Marchand 2009). None of these features is significant in the research that follows. My focus is on knowledge acquisition beyond formal processes of hiring and skill learning. In this regard, I look closely at the importance of personal relationships between workers, and between workers and contractors, the latter both managers and entrepreneurs. I craft this argument by merging ethnographic insights from within and beyond the worksite.

The thesis contributes to the aforementioned studies, but connects it with other studies primarily concerned with the social life of builders outside of the workplace (Lemasters 1976; Gill 2001). I show the entanglement of work and leisure time, on and off the worksite. In doing so, I ask what is considered work, and what is its social and personal worth (Wallman 1979), by ethnographically moving in and out of the workplace, whilst analytically merging the two.

In Belize, the construction industry contributed around 3% of the country's GDP (2015) (SIB 2015b), and nearly 42% (4,658) of those employed in this sector lived in the Belize District surrounding Belize City (SIB 2015a).⁶ Of these, 77% were Belizean, 10% Guatemalan, 6% Honduran and the remainder was made up of other nationalities (the total countries' proportions change little), all of whom are males (Ibid.). The men who appear in this thesis are between 20 and 50 years of age (within the 45% age-group in Belize city [SIB 2010]), part of the 4,658 workers estimated to be working mainly in construction within Belize District (SIB 2015a).

In urban areas, construction and manufacturing are amongst the sectors with higher poverty rates (37%), only below the 'informal sector' (under 50%), which includes 'casual workers, hustling' (GOB and CDB 2011, 80). When looking at urban and rural poverty, it is higher among agricultural workers and those in elementary (unskilled) occupations (GOB and CDB 2011, 77–78).⁷ Examining the maze of statistical categories, we discover that the latter includes 'building construction labourers', as well as other similar tasks (SIB 2015a). Thus, it is safe to say that construction workers, on the whole, are subject to harsh economic conditions. Their situation is connected with the difficulty for these labourers in climbing the ladder of a trade and being recognized as skilled, as will become clear in this thesis.

⁶ I use Belize District, Urban Belize District or Belize City according to the maximum precision afforded by the statistics available.

⁷ Unemployment rate 10.2% (male 6.8%, female 15.7%) (SIB 2015a).

The construction industry has attracted Central American migrants since the late 1970s (Iyo 1998), when Guatemalans, Salvadorians and Hondurans started to move to Belize mainly because of civil wars in their home countries (Palacio and Stone 1991). At the time attention was mainly directed to these refugees in rural areas and in agricultural work (Palacio 1990; Stone 1991; Longsworth Onofre and Grekos 1993; Plaisier 1996; see Palacio 1987 for an exception focused on Belmopan), since 75% of them relocated in rural areas (Palacio 1990), and many fuelled the need for labour force in the sugar, banana and citrus agro-industries.

Between 1980 and 1984, it is estimated that about 24,000 Central Americans arrived in Belize (Palacio and Stone 1991). In 1993, the UNHCR listed more than 800 refugees in Belize City, while there were about 30,800 immigrants from Central America in the country as a whole, around the 13% of the total population (Lennart 1993). The migration flux continued in the following years (A. Salazar 2000; Torres Hernandez 2013), and recent research has suggested that a good number of Central American migrants seemed to be working in construction (Acuña González 2012). These studies outlined the mix of economic migrants and refugees coming from Central America, and recently the rise in gang violence in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala has produced a new wave of asylum seekers about which so far we have journalistic reports and institutional calls rather than social research (Attanasio 2018; UNHCR 2018, 2017).

Some of the men encountered in the following pages arrived as adolescents during or in the aftermath of conflicts in Central America, others in the following years, yet others came fleeing the more recent surges in violent crime related to the gang situation in the region. By accounting for the narratives of men escaping violence in neighbouring countries, the following pages show how Belize City has also been a place of refuge within a regional flux beyond its status as a hub in the Belize-USA migratory pattern. Thus, the thesis helps in understanding the lives of these generations of Central Americans in Belize City, whose urban live and work in construction had received only passing mentions in reports and research outputs, and

constitutes a timely intervention on the theme of forced displacement in an area not yet touched by social research. It does so by privileging the ethnographic perspective. On the one hand, I argue that the personal relationships developed by builders facilitate migrants' insertion into the workforce and their occupational mobility, while (re)producing their specific place in the Belizean labour market.

On the other, I give a subjective and experiential view of these migrants' trajectories, their lives in the city and their aspirations. In doing so, I offer an account of these migrants' transnational connections (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Foner 1997; Kearney 1995; Levitt 2001) while focusing on the lives, livelihoods (Olwig and Sorensen 2002 more) and relationships (Hastrup and Olwig 1996b; Chavez 1988; Werbner 2013) which tie them to and situate them within Belize City. By juxtaposing migrants' and long-term city dwellers' perceptions of the city, the thesis interrogates the relationship between aspiration, hopes, and means of livelihood.

Methodology

The core of the qualitative data for this thesis was collected through participant observation, sharing everyday activities with my interlocutors during both working and non-working hours. As ethnographer, I became part of the social life of my interlocutors and worked alongside them.

The thesis is based on everyday observations and interactions conducted over a period of 12 months between April 2015 and April 2016. I spent my days walking around the neighbourhood and the city, being visited or visiting people around the city, having casual conversations while sharing a meal or a drink, 'killing time' in the evening with people in my vicinity, working alongside migrants and Belizeans at the construction site, or joining them after they finished their day's work. Thus, I spent a considerable amount of time in public spaces and in people's dwellings.

Accordingly, most of the spoken material comes from conversations and collective discussions, rather than pre-structured interviews. In the moment, I often took scrap notes, and wrote more extensive notes as soon as I could go home, in a quiet place, or at the end of the day. This is mainly because having conducted a few audio-recorded interviews, I found my interlocutors reluctant and uncomfortable when asked to sit down and answer questions. While not in the format of a formal interview, I did ask questions in order to gain deeper knowledge not only of the past of my interlocutors, but to expand my limited understanding as an inhabitant of the city and unskilled labourer. I also had conversations with social workers, architects and trade unionists in order to gain insights on the issues discussed in this thesis.

I accompanied my interlocutors, and I was accompanied myself, to do chores around the city. I frequented bars, clubs, public parks; I went to art exhibitions openings, wakes, funerals, religious functions, barbeques and followed people to the court. I shared stories and experience of my life when asked to do so to my interlocutors. I lent my bike, cooking utensils, occasionally money. I baby-sat, used my computer to show films and share or transfer music. I shared food, drinks and money in order to compensate my interlocutors for the time they were devoting to my data collection. This way I could explore the everyday dimension of life in Belize City from different angles, asking questions at different times and participating to some extent in the social life of my interlocutors as well as others whose lives do not figure in this thesis but who have informed the research.

In the first period of my fieldwork, I was particularly close to a cluster of day labourers, and I started to go to work sporadically accompanying Dylan, a neighbour of mine. I mainly had acquaintances in the Northside and I spent more time there. With time, the amount of people I knew began to grow and I started to regularly visit people in the Southside. Through a friend, I managed to make contact with a contractor who employed on a more consistent basis. In the second part of my fieldwork I thus worked more regularly and more often with experienced workers. The central chapters of the thesis (2, 3, 4, 5) follow the methodological trajectory of my fieldwork

while being informed by its totality. By living in the same area for the duration of my fieldwork, moving in the city, and working myself, it was possible for me to inquire into the fields on which the analytical discussion is based: everyday interactions, experience of city life and work.

Preliminary considerations on ethnicity and race⁸

The changing nature, and relations between, ethnic, racial and national categories in Belize has been analysed from the point of view of their political use (Bolland 2003, ch. 8; Cunin and Hoffmann 2013), in relation to place and livelihood (Johnson 2005), in the fields of socialization and education (Lundgren 1992; Haug 1998) and in the nation-building projects after independence (Shoman 2010; Stone 1994; see also Wilk 1986, 1992; Wilk and Chapin 1990, 1989; Brockmann 1977; Cosminsky 1977; Cosminsky and Whipple 1984; J. R. Gregory 1976; Roessingh and Bras 2003). The population is ethnically diverse, but two groups are predominant: 'Creole' and 'Mestizos'. The former outnumbers the latter in Belize City while the situation is reversed in the country as a whole (see Chart 1 and 2).

⁸ See the Appendix for data about the national and ethnic distribution of the labour force on Belize City and Belize.

Chart 1 Total population of Belize by Ethnicity⁹ (SIB 2010)

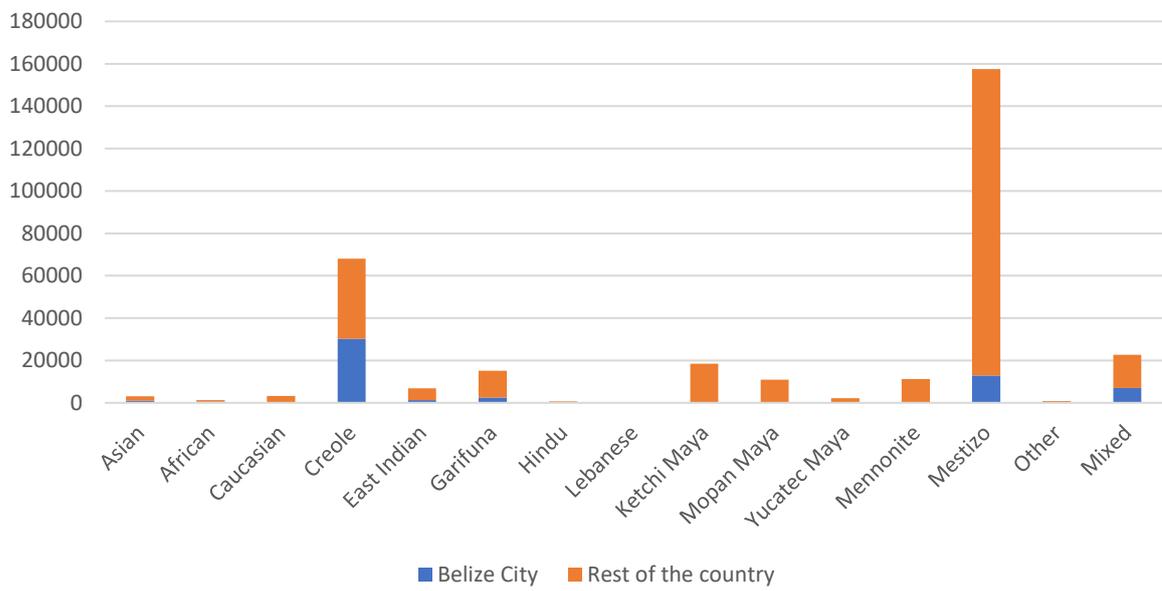
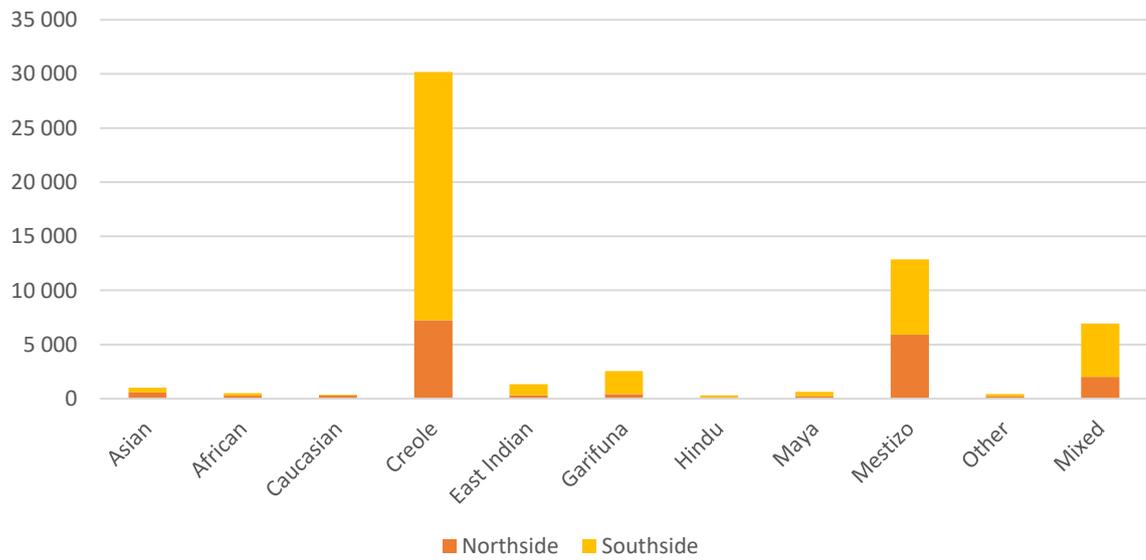


Chart 2 Population of Belize City by Ethnicity¹⁰ (SIB 2010)



In Belize City, the connections between nationality, race and ethnicity are encountered in the everyday with a measure of ambiguity, where physical appearance, clothing, language and place of birth all have a bearing on one's ascribed identity. Generally, 'Creole' is a broad ethnic categorization used to describe someone with mixed ancestry generally including some African origins. At the same time, people differentiate those of African ancestry by skin complexion: dark, brown, red. All these are sometimes subsumed in the category 'black', when the speaker alludes politically to a race-based solidarity or contrasts their belonging within this category with others deemed outside of it. Instead of 'Mestizo', which is rarely used, a person of mixed Spanish and indigenous ancestry is called 'Spanish' (or 'Panish', 'Pania'). However, this carries a connotation of possibly being not a Belizean national. Thus, many do not refer to themselves as Spanish, use instead the general term 'Belizean', or identify as Creole. *Paisa*, from *paisano* (countryman), is used in derogatory terms to refer to people born in other Central American countries and becomes at times synonym with 'alien'. People from Central America use inclusive categories 'hispano', 'latino', and distinguish themselves in various ways by adopting ethnic and racial categories, or saying that someone is more 'guero' (of clear skin complexion), 'Indio' (indigenous), or *negro, negrito, moreno* ('black').

The existence of an anti-Central American sentiment has been documented (Shoman 1990; Moberg 1996), and many Belizeans who look 'Spanish' often need to justify their own national belonging (cf. Medina 1997). In the construction industry, I have heard some remarks from workers and contractors about competition with the 'aliens' and their impact in lowering wages. At the same time, I saw Belizeans in need of work accepting lower wages. However, according to institutional reports (GOB and CDB 2011)

⁹ Excludes 'non stated' (0.01%). 'Hindu' were 624 (0.19%), 'Lebanese' 267 (0.08%), 'Other' 861 (0.27%).

¹⁰ Excludes 'non stated' (0.03%); 'Maya' includes Ketchi Maya 322 (0.56%), Mopan Maya 251 (0.44%), Yucatec Maya 46 (0.08%); I have added to 'Other': 'Mennonite' 51 (0.09%) and 'Lebanese' 94 (0.16%).

there is no evidence to support this narrative. Similarly, I have heard comments from builders about the tendencies of black Belizeans to work slow, while hearing the contrary from experienced workers of Central American origin; or comments about Black Belizeans wasting their wages from workers who were drinking with me.

More broadly, it has been argued that the issue of ethnic tension originates from the 'ethnic imbalance' entailed by the emigration of black Belizeans to the USA, and the concurrent immigration of Central Americans into the country (Woods, Perry, and Steagall 1997; Babcock and Conway 2000). Marc Moberg (1997) has shown the segmentation of the work force according to 'myths of ethnicity and nation' in the Belizean banana industry. Laurie Kroshus Medina (2004) discussed how workers and growers in the Belizean citrus industry positioned themselves situationally in terms of gender, class, political, ethnic, racial and national identity. Both these works provide important point of reference in terms of anthropological analyses of race and ethnicity in the context of work in Belize. Both deal with a large number of actors involved in sectors heavily influenced by the international market.

In the locally-oriented small-scale construction sector in which my interlocutors worked, such differences did not translate into a clear segmentation for the purposes of the management and control of the labour force. Thus, while ideas about race, ethnicity and nationality were held by my interlocutors, they do not constitute axes by which the labour force was either controlled, divided or united. Rather, I show in the thesis how autonomy and dependency have slightly different inflections depending on the positionality of workers. I analyse the prominence for my interlocutors of practices and values reproduced in and out of the workplace and recognized across ethnic and national lines. The table below (Table 1) shows

the estimated distribution of construction workers by ethnicity and nationality¹¹.

Table 1 Workers mainly employed in construction in Belize District by ethnicity and country of birth. (SIB 2015a)

		TOTAL COUNTRY	BELIZE DISTRICT
ETHNICITY	Creole	2180	1807
	Garifuna	873	164
	Maya	766	240
	Mestizo/Hispanic	6770	2255
	Other	554	192
COUNTRY OF BIRTH	Belize	8628	3613
	Guatemala	1102	368
	Honduras	527	295
	Other	886	382

Finally, I clarify the way in which I use certain categories in the thesis. I use Belizeans when referring to people born in Belize. Belizean citizens, to refer to people with Belizean citizenship irrespective of their place of birth. Central Americans, when referring to people born in Central American countries excluding Belize (mainly Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador). Spanish or Panish, following the popular usage outlined above. Afro-descendants, to refer to people who recognize and are recognized as having African ancestry or being 'black'. When I am talking of Belize City dwellers or inhabitants, I am stressing their residence in the city rather than nationality or ethnicity.

Language

I report speech as closely as possible to its original form. I have lightly edited speech only to avoid excessive repetition of interjections. I use three dots '...' to indicate a pause in speech, and dots in square brackets '[...]' to signal a considerable omitted part.

¹¹ See the Appendix for a comparison with other districts and related occupations.

Speakers of BK (Belize Kriol), like other Creole speakers, adopt forms of speech across a continuum varying in their closeness to or distance from SE (Standard English). In order to convey a sense of this continuity between BK and SE, these shifts in language are reported using a mix of English and Kriol spelling. During fieldwork, I gradually expanded my understanding of BK and started to use it in conversation. I was therefore increasingly addressed in BK, while some Belizeans would speak to me in BK because they did not know SE. I use the Belizean Kriol spelling system as systematized by Crosbie et al. (2007; see also Decker 2013; *YOU Can Read and Write Kriol* 2010).¹²

When the quotations are short, I provide the English equivalents in brackets '[']' within the quotation, or immediately after '()'. When I use longer quotes, I provide the SE in footnotes. When speakers use SE, I do not correct constructions which are grammatically odd or incorrect in British English (e.g. double negatives or verbs conjugations which do not match their subject pronoun) without further clarification when the meaning is conveyed.

In Belize, there has been an effort to promote and study BK as a language. Defining BK as a language rather than 'broken English' (the latter being a commonly held view in Belize) or dialect, is an effort to dignify BK as the most spoken *language* in the country and not a mere corruption of English (the language of the colonizer). While this effort has arguably been initiated by a small elite, and the standardization of the BK spelling system is far from commonly applied or understood, there is an increasing use of BK in political speeches, in newspaper reporting, as well as in printed and broadcasted commercials, and in national literature.

I use the standardised BK spelling system for three reasons: accuracy in reporting how people speak, providing the regional specialist reader with a

¹² See the Appendix for a schematic rendering of the BK writing system.

precise rendering (BK writing system is phonetic), and politically not reducing BK to SE.

All speech with Central Americans is translated from Spanish. My interactions with speakers for whom Spanish was the first language were almost exclusively in Spanish from the beginning of fieldwork. I report original expressions and phrases in *italics* to convey a sense of the spoken language and stress some important concepts. My translation is generally idiomatic and not literal. However, I have left some characteristics of the spoken language in translation (e.g. use of present tense even when clearly referring to past events) to stay close to the original.

Thesis outline

The thesis looks at the relationship of work and social life by situating the issues raised in this Introduction within a rich ethnographic context addressed with different analytical lenses in each chapter.

In chapter 1, I approach construction work from the perspective of how skills link employability, constancy of employment and occupational mobility, as a way of presenting some of the most relevant aspects of the working conditions faced by my interlocutors. I further develop this perspective in chapters 2 and 5. I show how workers are situated and understand their positioning in terms of autonomy and dependence, tracing the relevance of these terms through quotidian discourses. I argue that the social and personal aspects of work in relation to uncertainty, precarity and social mobility are best understood by looking at how workers value their work with respect to relations of production. This, in turn, is articulated in relative terms of autonomy and dependency. This analysis is elaborated in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 is focused upon day labourers' efforts to make a living. I explore the least 'skilled' and most precarious workers through the local practice of 'catch and kill'. I analyse the conjunction of waged and wageless economic

activities which comprise the livelihood of day labourers. I focus on movement as an ethnographic lens through which work in construction and hustling reproduce the labourer's position at the bottom of the industry's hierarchy. Through this, I offer a perspective on Belize City which accounts for subjective navigations of both its social and economic disparities and the knowledge necessary for successful hustling of the labourers situated within it.

Chapter 3 follows the previous chapter by inscribing one particular labourer's social relationships within the contexts of his kin and neighbours. For this purpose, I present a detailed ethnography of his and his spouse's quotidian social interactions in order to unveil the understandings which guide economic expectations and interactions with regard to people in their vicinity. This part of the ethnography reveals how ideas about their economic dependability guides the cultivation of mutual relationships with consanguines, affines and neighbours. The chapter expands overall focus on the male-oriented quest for means of survival by showing the economic relevance of broader patterns of relationship in the city within which these men are situated, and the importance of their work as it affects how these relationships are sustained and handled.

Chapter 4 looks at how one worker (in this case an apprentice) negotiates his relationships with distant and close relatives. I show how this man and his partner managed kin relations spread out between their native Honduras, in Belize City and the USA, where they planned to move. The chapter focuses on their plan for migration as it centred on their nuclear family, and on the fluid reconstitution of their household in Belize City. I show how, for this more recently immigrated couple, the man's workmates have primary significance in forming relationships in the city, in contrast with those of long-term city dwellers. Friendly relationships which extend beyond the workplace provide mutual support pivotal for work opportunities and facilitate occupational mobility and income security. I simultaneously offer a perspective on Belize City from the Central American migrant grouping and show how they are inserted/insert themselves into specific niches of the

labour market and how they navigate their occupational and legal conditions in the country by simultaneously orienting themselves in relation to their present in the city, and their imagined future in the USA.

Chapter 5 brings together the builders from the previous chapters in the space of the worksite, and proposes an analysis centred on skilled workers. Here relations between workers are negotiated according to an egalitarian ethos based on mutual respect. I look at the construction site as a place where working, learning, resting and joking are intelligible to workers because of their experience in building. According to this tacit knowledge they reproduce work values on site. This also permits builders to coordinate their work and together manipulate working and resting times in ways which impact their wages. They tactically challenge the contractor's authority while recognizing a set of values that allows them to evaluate their status in the worksite while being compliant with the working schedule. In analysing the building site as a place of labour, rest, learning and laughing, I show how interactions on the worksite are related to those outside of it and constitute the means by which workers are able to secure employment stability.

Chapter 6 features ideas about the future amongst the workers previously encountered in the thesis. I juxtapose the 'American Dream' of reaching the USA of Central American migrants with what I call the 'Belizean Dream' of settling in the village that many Belize City dwellers have to. I show how the imagery of an 'elsewhere' beyond the city affords insights into the experience of the present in the city itself. By exploring the accounts of a father and son from Honduras, I show how their present in Belize City was seen against a background of normalized crisis in their country. They show an open and tentative stance with respect to their present disposition in relation to the opportunities they see as urbanites. In focusing on the accounts of village life of four workers and two contractors, I show how their understanding of the village reflects the critical realities of life in Belize City.

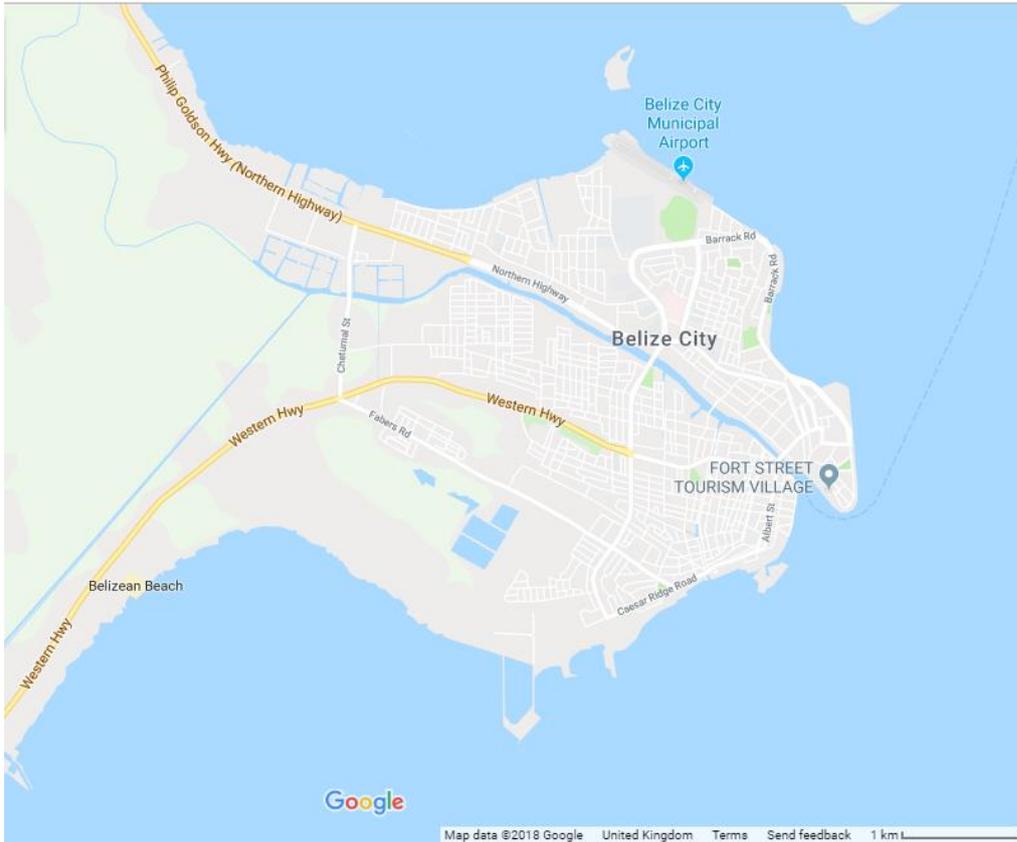
Maps



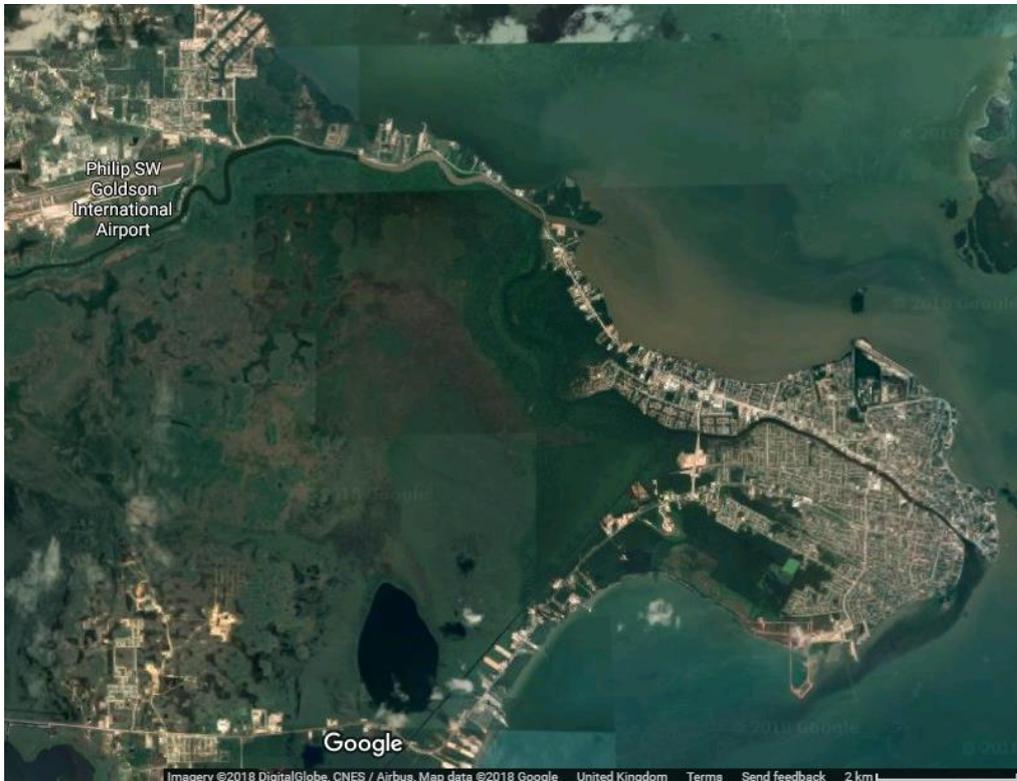
Map 1 Belize within Central America and the Caribbean. Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/>



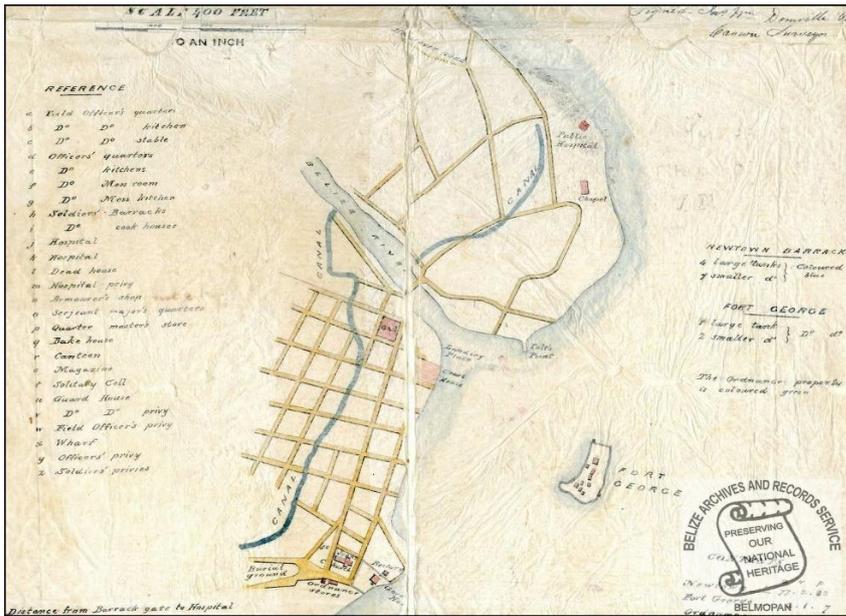
Map 2 Belize and its districts. (University of Texas Libraries n.d.)



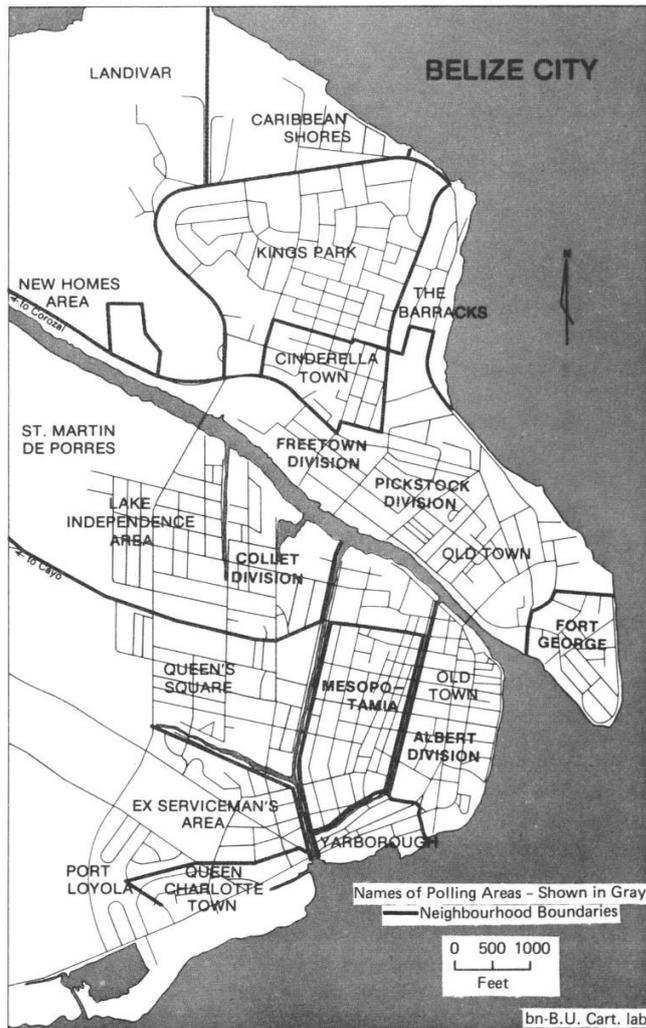
Map 3 Belize City. Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/>



Map 4 Belize City. On the top left the village of Ladyville and the International Airport. Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/>



Map 5 Belize Town 1841 (now known as Belize City). Belize Archives & Records in (Pigou-Dennis and Grydehøj 2014, 265)



Map 6 Belize City 1980s (Everitt 1986, 86)

Chapter 1. Skills and autonomy

It's Monday, a few minutes after seven in the morning. I walk down the road where I live. I see Dylan waiting for me at the crossroad. We greet each other and walk together towards the Southside, reaching the bus terminal just as our bus passes in front of us. Had we arrived a few seconds earlier, we would have caught it. Dylan shouts to a man transporting three long steel reinforcing bars that the pawn shop is not open yet, the man greets him and continues with the bulky, heavy load. Another bus is coming, so we quickly cancel our coffee order from the food stall next to the fish market, and jump on the old US school bus that takes us to the outskirts of Belize City. We get off after fifteen minutes, walk for another twenty, and finally reach the house – under construction for a Belizean businessperson – where we will be working.

Two men are digging outside the house. Dylan introduces me to the elder of the two, and explains my work. I am soon asked if I 'want to do some tying.' 'Yes, sure', I reply. 'The boss don't pay much, he pay 40 dollars¹³ for the day.' I am summoned, and I accept. He takes me to the back of the yard, where there is a section of a ditch that they dug yesterday. It will serve as the foundation of the boundary wall around the house. Today, they will continue digging around to the other side of the house and the front.

Dylan was a thirty-five-year-old man, born and bred in Belize City. He lived in a squatter flat (near where I was renting my own room) without mains water supply and with an illegal electricity connection. His twenty-six-year-old partner, her toddler, and their daughters of five and six years old were

¹³ All amounts in Belizean Dollars unless otherwise stated.

living with him. I met Dylan during my first days of fieldwork and he became one of my main interlocutors, occasionally taking me to work with him. That day, he took me to meet some of the people with whom he was working at the time. I was not expecting to work myself, since he had not been asked to bring another labourer. However, because the work had to be completed over the next few days, my involvement as an extra pair of hands allowed them to complete the fence sooner and comply with the building schedule. I could 'write about this too', I was told. Dylan had been working for a few days with the same contractor. The mason, who was the oldest among us, acted as supervisor; the mason's nephew served as his helper (he was an apprentice).

As instructed by the mason, I started to prepare a reinforcing-bar structure (to 'tie' the bars) for the fence's foundation. Meanwhile, Dylan and the mason's nephew were breaking up segments of land and cement with a pick and lifting them out with a shovel. The mason was helping to break the bigger pieces of cement with a metallic bar, or doing other tasks such as cutting segments from the long steel-bars when I needed them. Dylan was needed for this phase of the construction in terms of the physically demanding nature of the work. My inclusion in the day's schedule would have allowed them to lay the foundation sooner than expected. It turned out to be a 'good day' for Dylan, he could go home at the end with a 'lee cheese' ('little money') for him and his family.

This chapter situates the construction workers encountered in this vignette and in the rest of the thesis within the organization of work in the small-scale construction industry within which I conducted fieldwork. The first part of the chapter details how the skills-based hierarchy operating in the industry rests upon the evaluation of particular skills and the understanding of the kind of work they entail. This is central for occupational mobility within the industry and the different positions of workers in terms of constancy and flexibility of their employment. It follows a discussion about the relationships

these positionalities entail and the reputational aspects by which they are underlined.

The second part of the chapter details the pervasive importance of autonomy and dependency in epistemological terms as they frame positionalities on different scales which connect work with a wider understanding of a psychological, social and national nature. The third, and last, part of the chapter merges the previous two parts in refocusing the discussion on work, tackling its social and personal value with respect to the relationship between work and life conditions and prospects for social mobility.



Figure 1 To 'tie' bars at a construction site in Belize city

1.1 Hierarchy and skills at work

I completed my task towards the end of the day and rejoined Dylan, the mason and his nephew. They were chatting about the boss, how much profit he would have made from the contract for the house, and his expensive new

car. Dylan had felt disrespected, as the contractor wanted him to work an extra hour because, as he claimed, we arrived late. They were laughing at the contractor, because he had incorrectly drawn the plan and continued to pursue it against the suggestions of the mason. The mason also asked me if I could work the next day, even if the chances were slim since the boss was 'not really smart' enough to realize that they would need the extra pair of hands. Indeed, the contractor later told him that his budget was not enough for four people, despite the fact that the work needed to be finished by Friday. In the event, I was not called back to work, neither was Dylan. For me, the justification was the lack of funds for another labourer; for Dylan, it was his lack of discipline: arriving late to work and not accepting to work for an extra hour.

The volatile occupational conditions of labourers are exemplified by this particular day at work, which is representative of the days that I spent as a participant-observer on construction sites. Many of these labourers 'catch and kill', an expression which denotes involvement in different economic activities which are short-lived and grant poor, short-term financial returns. The next chapter analyses in more detail the mixture of wage and non-wage earnings which constitute 'catch and kill'. For now, I emphasize that a contractor can easily dismiss an unskilled labourer, either because of the labourer's alleged indiscipline or simply because the contractor has no need for workers on a particular day. When in need, the contractor can call the same labourer back or rely on the reserve of unskilled labourers who wait to be employed. These workers constituted a 'reserve army' in Marx's terms (1976:781): a surplus population absorbed or repelled according to the need for labourers (cf. Gill 2001, 32).

Contractors recognized the importance of a readily-available workforce supplied by those who catch and kill. They relied upon an established team of ordinarily employed workers, and extra labourers were hired only when specific tasks demanded additional unskilled labourers. A contractor in his forties explained:

Only like when you da do casting [of cement], a floor, a roof or somting, den you would get dem guys just pass through: 'What! Ah see you ga a casting' man! Ah can come man?'. 'Yes come!' An you have a 5-6-7-8 a dem. [...]

Kech ahn kil! Dem di guys dat do kech ahn kil but dem important, right!?! [laughs] Because ... [...] Dem always di first stage man and anytime you ga' di casting dem ready! 'Cause you gat some guys weh do survival pan it, because Ah [mi] do survival, right, too. Yes! Just casting..¹⁴

In the small-scale construction industry, the electric mixer is replaced by the unskilled labourer, who does the 'hard work.' In the quote above, the contractor expresses approval which increases the importance of those who catch and kill. He practised 'catching' on worksites himself before becoming a skilled worker and later hiring people as a contractor. Values related to 'working hard' and awareness of the years of 'survival' are expressed with sympathy towards these 'first stage men.' Moreover, his words accentuate the importance of day labourers in terms of labour processes on site. For contractors it is advantageous to rely on these workers as they provide the flexibility and ad hoc availability that fits their building schedules – '*anytime you do di casting dem ready!*' Whilst contractors did not often stress the advantages of this flexibility in terms of control over the labour force, an occasional labourer could be easily dismissed without much difficulty in finding a replacement, as there was high demand for work. Thus, it is much easier to replace the unskilled labour force in comparison to skilled workers, and it would not have the same negative impact on the building schedule because there was always a reserve of unskilled workers to fill the vacated

¹⁴ Only when you are doing casting [of cement], a floor, a roof or something, then you get the guys who are just passing by and ask: 'What! I see that you have casting to be done! Can I come man?'. 'Yes come!' And you have 5-6-7-8 of them.

Catch and kill! They are the guys who do catch and kill but they are important, right!?! Because... They are always the first stage man and anytime you got casting they are ready! Because you have some guys who survive on it. Because I [used to] do survival too, right. Yes! Just casting...

position. This is reflected in the position of the unskilled workforce at the bottom of the construction industry's hierarchy, and derives from the difference in the skills the two hold. Skilled workers are differentiated according to the precise skillsets they possess. I report the terms by which workers identified with different skillsets in English with their equivalent in Spanish, since I have conducted fieldwork among speakers of both languages. A skilled worker can be a mason (the ubiquitous way of referring to brick layer, *'albañil'* in Spanish), welder (*soldador*), carpenter (*carpintero*).¹⁵ Helpers (*ayudantes*) are attached to skilled workers, whom they assist at their work and from whom they thus learn a trade. Throughout the thesis, for sake of concision and to avoid repetitions, I use 'unskilled workers' and 'labourers' or 'day labourers' interchangeably. I also refer to 'skilled workers' as 'tradesman'. I call 'helpers', 'skilled-to-be workers' or alike, and 'apprentices' when it is clear that I am referring to apprenticeship within the construction industry. All these are also referred to generally as 'builders' or 'construction workers', or simply 'workers' when it is apparent that I am specifically considering work in construction. All these denominations are always exclusive of 'contractors'.

The relations between contractors and skilled labourers are usually longer-lasting, and involve a higher degree of cooperation and trust, than the relationships between contractors and unskilled labourers. The former get to know (and trust) each other over time and they value each others' complementary roles. A contractor can also be an architect, or have knowledge of masonry, carpentry, or welding, or simply own machinery and possess the means to employ people himself. However, even when the

¹⁵ I found that specialization as tiler or painter was often subsumed by these categories. Given the small size of the country, and of its working population, there is an absence of clear-cut distinctions by trade (see for instance Marchand 2001). While one is mainly knowledgeable about one trade, it is common to possess and apply other kind of expertise. Given the substantially different kind of expertise and of possible dangers which is involved in work with electricity and liquids/gas, plumbing and electrical work are less likely to be done by the same person. During my fieldwork, I have almost exclusively done fieldwork with workers who did not master electrical and plumbing skills, therefore my analysis does not necessarily pertain to these trades.

contractor is also an architect or worked in the past as a carpenter, he will still draw upon the expertise of, say, a mason when building a wall, or a welder when securing a metal gate. For a specific task to be completed effectively with regards to quality and time-cost efficiency, the contractor must rely on the skills and trustworthiness of a skilled labourer, who is in turn responsible for the work of a helper and/or a day labourer. Ultimately, the skilled labourer has the knowledge necessary to bring the project to completion. Furthermore, since the skilled worker supervises others, he needs to act as a deputy for the contractor when the latter leaves the site, to assure that the work schedule is respected. Thus, the contractor's reliance on unskilled workers has also to do with the trust underlying this relationship. According to Hart (2000, 113), trust is central to relations in which 'constraints imposed by kinship identity and legal contract' are relatively absent. In the context analysed here, where production is neither industrial nor formalised by contractual arrangements, trust becomes central and consolidates the mutual bonds between workers and contractors. By establishing close relationships with contractors, skilled workers deepen personal relationships which in turn strengthen working ties. By using skilled and unskilled as adjectives to describe builders, I do not imply the absence of skills by the former. Rather, I emphasize the value that various (recognised and unrecognised) skills have in terms of labour relations and, as I show in the next chapter, the relationship that various kinds of workers have with the products of their labour.

1.1.1 Skills and the physicality of work

On the afternoon of the same day of the opening vignette, I heard the mason negotiating with the contractor over the plan for the fence that we were building. The mason insisted that the plan he held in his hands was inadequate for the actual space around the house. After a while, the contractor (in this case also an architect) was convinced, and the mason later proudly stressed to us his ability to identify the mistake because of his experience. Likewise, the skilled labourers usually employed by Mr. Juan,

the contractor for whom I mostly worked, talked about how Juan knew how to manage expenses (i.e. how to account for time, materials, workforce and profit), but not how to work – *'Él sabe hacer la cuenta, esto sí que lo sabe, pero el trabajo no'* ('He knows how to calculate, he definitely knows that, but he doesn't know the work.'). Therefore, they were the ones (in their minds) with the knowledge and the skills that allowed construction work to go ahead (cf. Ahrens and Mollona 2007). Builders understood their work to be the production of tangible objects, while the contractors' work was managerial (and entrepreneurial) in nature. They also framed contractors' work in terms of 'making money out of people's hands/after your head,' and the contractors' wealth as derived from the exploitation of workers' labour.

The labourer who catches and kills does not hold a particular repertoire of skills in the ways that the skilled labourers do. This is not to say that he has none. Indeed, a degree of bodily knowledge is acquired over time. This was evident when I was instructed on how to 'tie', to mix cement and sand, to carry a wheelbarrow efficiently, or to secure a piece of scaffolding to be lowered. Or when I learned, through practice, how to handle tools such as shovels when mixing, or pliers when tying. To gain this kind of knowledge initially required a degree of care and attention, particularly in order to avoid injury. For instance, after cutting myself during tying, or holding a metal lintel that was being cut, I received disappointed looks from the skilled workers who said things like: 'Don't work with your hands, let the tool work!', and *'Ehhh...se lo dije que se iba a cortar!'* ('Ehhh...I've told him that he was going to cut himself!'). With time and practice, however, these actions became repetitive and were executed without much mindfulness. Nonetheless, such skills are hardly recognised in negotiations with a contractor; they are only acknowledged in the relation between skilled and unskilled worker, in which context they are still seen as an inferior kind of knowledge to the expertise of the skilled worker.

1.1.2 Skilfully unskilled

One day, Dylan had been called to help a mason to lay a concrete floor as part of a house extension on the Southside of the city. Dylan called for me, and on the way we picked up Alex, a friend of Dylan since the days when they were both employed in heavy-duty tasks as part of a gang prevention programme (see Muhammad 2015). Alex was in his mid-twenties, born and bred in Belize City, but had moved to a village in Belize District from where he often commuted to the city, making a living cleaning buses for a local company. He came with us that day, happy to earn some extra dollars.

The house owner had directly contracted the mason, and Alex and I were supervised by Dylan. The three of us were taking it in turns to measure, mix and transport cement to the mason who was evenly distributing it to create a flat surface. The work involved constant mixing and needed to be coordinated with the mason's work: as soon as he finished a segment of the pavement, freshly-mixed cement needed to be ready for pouring. While the tasks done by the three of us were the same, it was Dylan who assigned roles, checked the quality of the work, encouraged and directed us, gave us 'fives' (breaks) and negotiated a longer break and trip to the shop with the mason, allowing us to eat and rest.

The three of us were paid the same, but Dylan assumed a leading role in coordinating the work. However, it was the mason who was responsible for the final product. He was paid by piece work and paid us for the day. In this case, the coordination necessary between workers demanded meant that the unskilled workers (Alex and I) had to be supervised by a more experienced unskilled labourer (in this case, Dylan) (see § 5.3). Thus, being unskilled but experienced and known by a skilled worker can lead to a specific hierarchical position in the flexible organization of work on the site. However, this does not grant a more privileged position in the relationship between labourers and contractors, nor a better pay rate. Thus, while a labourer can have an amount of knowledge in terms of labouring practice

and organization, this knowledge is not unrecognized in the relationship with contractors: a knowledgeable labourer is not as important for a contractor as for example a fast mason, or a precise tiler. Because the labourer's set of skills is considered secondary, the terms of his employment involve a lower degree of negotiation (i.e. he would not be paid more because is known as a good labourer, while this can happen in the case of a tradesman). This was not only a matter of employment conditions. From the labourer's perspective, possessing skills has little to do with recognition as a "skilled" worker. In other words, a labourer's contribution to a project is seen as only consisting of physical input. This translates into the feeling of being 'underestimated', or, as they put it: of not seeing one's potential as fully developed and recognized at work.

Finally, the working and living conditions of the day labourers prevent them from acquiring more skills, especially at times when the industry is not booming¹⁶. Those who catch and kill are not able to learn a specific trade, as they are not in the position to be taught skills. Whereas helpers serve as informal apprentices (Graves 1989) to the skilled workers, day labourers do not have the sustained contact with the latter to acquire any in-depth knowledge.¹⁷ On the day when I was asked to 'tie' metallic bars, the mason employed by the contractor took his nephew with him as a helper. There was already a working relationship between the two: the uncle had been consistently teaching his nephew. The nephew and Dylan were supposedly paid the same, and had the same assignment. However, Dylan was not expected to learn any skills as his position was not that of an apprentice: he was simply catching and killing. The figure of speech 'Jack of all trades, master of none', as well known in Belize as elsewhere, could not be more

¹⁶ The older skilled workers and contractors with whom I talked remembered the beginning of the 1990's as a period of prosperity, during which the industry was booming (cf. Iyo 1998). For instance, Pete (quoted above) started to 'catch' as labourer at that time, then progressing to establish his own business.

¹⁷ Apprenticeship can be analysed off and on site as it facilitates transmission of both work-related skills per se and economic and social relations. Here, however, I mainly focus on the skills transmission aspect (see ch. 4 and 5 for a broader perspective).

appropriate to describe such unskilled workers. With little surprise, after I helped Dylan in opening a Facebook account, I noticed that his work status replicated the first part of that catchphrase, although (when he had to open a new account because he forgot the password) he changed it to a more neutral 'self-employed.'

1.1.3 Skills and flexible employment

Workers can be distinguished between unskilled, skilled and skilled-to-be (i.e. 'helpers'). The place of a worker in the skills-based hierarchy corresponds to different working conditions which are in turn tied to the nature of the labour market, the nature of the work in construction, the relations between workers, and the relations between workers and contractor.

The construction industry demands flexibility from its workforce. Projects last for a fixed duration of time, therefore workers are only temporarily employed on a given project and have to constantly seek new work opportunities. On a single project, the number of workers with different skillsets can change on a daily basis depending on the kind of labour required. Besides the work schedule, factors such as the weather, availability of materials and tools (which at times have to be borrowed by a contractor), and the management of eventual delays by increasing the number of workers or the hours of work per day, contribute to a fluctuating need for workers (cf. Applebaum 1981).

Subcontracting is an effective form of work organization (though not the only suitable system for the mutable products and unsure market of the construction sector, particularly in the cases of large-scale construction projects [Thiel 2012, 13]). Uncertainty is therefore scaled down from the level of the project itself, managed by big contractors, to smaller sub-contractors. In the small-scale industry in which I conducted fieldwork, changing demands were reflected in variable building schedules and were

observable in the employment of different kinds and numbers of workers by a contractor. While the irregularity and uncertainty of employment affected everybody, the most vulnerable were unskilled labourers. The certitude of uncertainty amongst labourers meant it was impossible to plan beyond contingencies and a focus on the present (cf. ch. 2 and 6).

Moreover, the skilled workers' division by trade was not clear-cut and definitive. While the size of the construction sector in other contexts allows for a strong trade specialization (Applebaum 1981; Thiel 2012), in Belize City, skilled workers are recognized for a specific skillset but are often able to draw upon other kinds of skills when needed. This seems to be a result of the small scale of the industry and its workforce. Both the demands of different expertise on site, and the changes in employment during one's lifetime, allowed for secondary skillsets to be learned. This may also have been influenced by changes in construction techniques. In house building, the traditional use of timber has been increasingly accompanied, but not substituted, by the use of cement. Thus, carpenters, for instance, had to learn how to apply carpentry to cement work and how to lay bricks in order to be employable. Skilled workers could therefore more easily adapt to the shifting nature of construction work, complementing one skill with another. Helpers also enjoyed more stable employment patterns than labourers, as they were usually needed by skilled workers for their assistance. Additionally, helpers were asked to do unskilled tasks when they were occasionally needed for a short time. Their position of becoming-skilled meant that they could be asked to do kinds of tasks which were not acceptable for a tradesman, but also assist in skilled tasks, treading the boundary between skilled and unskilled work. Thus, since they were a permanent presence, they could be utilized more flexibly than labourers.



Figure 2 Old wooden house



Figure 3 A more contemporary cement house under construction in the city

Furthermore, the possibilities of reducing the casualization of one's labour by climbing the ladder of a trade were limited for the labourers who, in contrast with helpers, were not informal apprentices. Beyond labouring tasks, the differences between skilled and unskilled workers are important in terms of finding work opportunities as well as the ways in which they are dismissed. In the Belizean context¹⁸, the lack of unions, hiring halls or other formal mechanisms for workforce recruitment, means that there is more reliance on personal relationships (e.g. with contractors) when looking for employment. Moreover, all workers were subject to equally flexible conditions in terms of layoffs. If construction workers are subject to easy layoffs even when working within formal contractual terms what Paap (2006, 33) calls the 'structural insecurity' ingrained in the nature of contractual relationships in the industry, this was even more so for the workers with whom I worked – skilled and unskilled alike – who were not formally employed. Especially in this context, personal relationships based on status were pivotal. On one hand, labourers were subject to shorter interactions with contractors, thus having less opportunity to develop the kind of personal relationships that could create future opportunities for work; on the other, the "unskilled" nature of their labour put them in a particularly uncertain condition.

The workers encountered in this thesis were all employed informally when working for small contractors (hiring somewhere between 3 and 10 workers for workday). Anthropologists have showed the central role of personal relationships when there is a lack of formal employment mechanisms (Pahl 1984, ch. 5; Harris, Lee, and Morris 1985), as well as in the case of informal production and exchange that run parallel to formal employment (Mollona 2005). Taking informality to be a matter not only of 'form', as restricted regularity of bureaucratic reach (Hart 1992), but also question of degree (Hart 1973), it is possible to trace how employment is impacted by personal

¹⁸ Small scale construction industry is also reliant on informal employment in first world countries (e.g. Mingione 1990). For an overview of construction and informality see (WIEGO n.d.; Carol, Roger, and Keith 2005).

relationships by looking at skills.¹⁹ This, within an analysis of productive process which includes relations of kinship, propinquity and friendship as well as 'qualities such as trust, affection or mere frequentation' (Narotzky 1997, 38) for both labourers and tradesman.

1.1.4 Skills and relationships

Skills are not only pivotal to understanding the terms and conditions of employment, but are also central to exploring how these conditions come to inform and shape social relationships. Focusing on the relational aspect of work also elucidates differences in hiring and firing practices touched upon above. These relationships are the outcome of the organization of labour on site as well as the significance that particular kinds of labour hold for the actors involved. In terms of the organization of labour, the contractor sets tasks for skilled workers and for helpers. Labourers, on the other hand, may be directed by skilled workers or contractors. Contractors' success in completing a given project on time depends on the trustworthiness of skilled workers. Skilled workers depend on the assistance of helpers to complete their task. Tradesmen establish more durable relationships with contractors because of the reliance of contractors on them. Helpers, through their relationship with skilled workers, also establish more enduring relationships. Whilst labourers *are* recognized as necessary to the completion of a project, the nature of their tasks, the lower degree of trust involved in their relationships and the lower dependency of the contractor and of other workers on the *quality* of their work means that their relationships with other workers and the contractor are comparatively more anonymous. As seen above (§1.1.2), even when labourers are known to a contractor (i.e. they have worked with him before), and are recognized as 'good' labourers (who work hard and do not need much in terms of explanation or instructions),

¹⁹ Here, I am concerned with employment and kinds of relationships. See Wells (2007) for other aspects described as informal in the construction industry at large.

their relationship rarely translates into better employment opportunities in terms of frequency and salary as it does for skilled workers.

This becomes apparent when looking at status. The investment that different workers may have in the quality and timeliness of a project are reflected in the status they acquire through such work and the relationships this status entails, all of which in turn conditions their future employability. For contractors, the quality and timely completion of a project mean acquiring reputation and possible future contracts. For a skilled worker, this also involves gaining reputation: increased recognition of his work, thus more possibilities of being employed. The reputation of a contractor depends upon the reputation of a worker. Tradesmen also stressed that as a result a particular contractor with whom they work will secure more contracts and they will benefit by being employed on these projects. Thus, mutual interest has two interrelated features. Firstly, skilled workers become more employable by working well: they acquire status. Contractors, by completing projects successfully as a result of tradesmen's work, also acquire status which increases their possibilities of being given projects.²⁰ Secondly, on the level of personal relationships, workers increase their constancy of employment if a specific contractor for whom they work increases his number of contracts by virtue of his improving reputation. Moreover, this also means the strengthening of bonds between workers and contractors, so that workers may be able to negotiate a better pay rate on the grounds that they provide contractors with valuable labour. For a contractor, their departure would mean a loss of a worker who has proven themselves to be reliable.

Helpers also increase their chances of being called back by the contractor or by the same worker who has appreciated their work. The relationships established on the grounds of status tie skilled workers and contractors by

²⁰ Since contractors become known by word of mouth, reputation is particularly important as determines recommendations between costumers which increase the contractor's clientele. For workers, reputation is equally important as there are not formal systems for recognizing qualification.

what is seen as a mutual benefit based on productivity.²¹ In other words, while contractors benefit from keeping 'good' workers, and workers benefit in turn from being 'good' at their job, labourers and contractors do not see the relationship between them to rest upon complementarity of interests. As seen above, the work of builders and contractors is understood as essentially different in nature. Workers all recognize this difference irrespective of their skills, while differentiating between themselves in terms of skills in qualitative and quantitative terms. The former refers to the kind of skillset: for instance, workers distinguish those who master welding from those who knows carpentry. The latter regards the "amount" of skills possessed: a tradesman knows more than an apprentice, who in turn knows more than a labourer. However, in terms of work relationships, the divide between skilled and unskilled workers lies in the degree of complementarity between them and contractors in terms of status deriving from their work, and thus in the shared interests in future opportunities for work.

1.2 Autonomy

Generally, autonomy is valued positively in Belize as either an acquired condition or an aspiration. Autonomy thus also plays an important role in ideas of work and employment. The aim of this section is to trace the significance of the polarity between autonomy and dependency, exploring how the experience of on-site work affects a worker's understandings of their relative autonomy or dependency in society at large. In this context, the idea of personal autonomy, of being your 'own boss', plays a pivotal role in positive self-evaluation. In the Caribbean, the significance of personal autonomy is historically linked to the institution of slavery (Lowenthal 1972, 9). Ethnographic studies have stressed autonomy as an important value for many Caribbean people with reference to different economic practices (Browne 2004; Sampath 1997; Safa 1986; Prentice 2015). For instance, what Browne has described as 'creole economics' in Martinique is a set of

²¹ See chapter 5 for a discussion of the negotiations and contradictions between workers' and contractors' interests as they emerge in the worksite.

culturally informed economic practices which rest on cross-class values that emphasize cleverness, intelligence and success, demonstrated by engaging, alongside formal employment, in informal economic activities of exchanging services and goods. Tracing the relevance of creole economics as grounded in history starting from slavery and underlined by the necessity of the then poor Martiniquais to make use of a system not under their control, Browne argues that beyond economic rationalities it responds to the need of 'personal autonomy, for freedom from an employer's rules, for the satisfaction of having an activity of one's own.' (Browne 2002, 383)

In the present discussion, I situate the importance of autonomy in the experience of work and working conditions (which I expand upon when looking at the workplace in ch. 5) within the wider salience of autonomy for Belize City dwellers. Autonomy and independence are conditions which are seen in a positive light, part of a register by which subjects evaluate their position as workers, post-colonial subjects and citizens. If autonomy and independence are at the positive end of this moral spectrum, dependency is at the lower or less desirable end. I show the relevance of autonomy across areas of Belizean social life as I move from an ethnographic focus on work relations towards the broader post-colonial condition of the country. I do so by grounding the analysis in my ethnography of working conditions and of everyday verbal exchanges. The aim is not to propose a dichotomy in cultural terms (cf. Sutton 1974; also Drummond 1980),²² but rather to show the relevance of these two concepts, and the relationship between them, in the understandings of my interlocutors. I show that autonomy is not only positively evaluated in terms of working conditions, but also supplies a register with which to evaluate and explain one's social position more broadly. There are however frictions and idiosyncrasies in how autonomy and dependency are formulated. If autonomy as an aspired condition is the opposite of dependency, the former desirable while the latter regrettable, in reality people and things are left not only in-between the two, but also often

²² I show below and in the following chapters that the relationship between the two is complex and nuanced, rather than suggesting a strong opposition (cf. Ferguson 2013).

embracing both conditions at the same time. Moreover, in the understanding of one's position within this framework, the sense of dependency is heightened for Belizean citizens, and in particular for those who are of African descent. Therefore, while all workers place value on personal autonomy, those who are Belizeans and black read their experience within a historical, political and colonial context which emphasizes their position as particularly dependent and undesirable.

1.2.1 Autonomy at work

Firstly, construction workers enjoy different degrees of autonomy in terms of employment conditions. Piece-rate employment offers some possibility for autonomy, as earnings are based on the completion of a particular task or product rather than working hours. Moreover, skilled workers can take on a small contract or a sub-contract from a contractor according to the tools they possess, and are responsible for workers under their supervision. These possibilities are tied to one's skills, reputation and knowledge of the labour market at large. While it is possible for the skilled worker to take on small contracts, it is clearly understood amongst the builders that there is a clear division between them and contractors. 'You know who makes money (*quien hace el dinero*)? The contractors, they make money for sure' or that contractors 'hustle money after your head' (i.e. make money on top of your work) or 'make money out of people's hands'.

A labourer or a helper can be paid between 30 and 45 \$ per day, while a skilled worker receives between 55 and 80 \$²³. The rate depends on a prior knowledge of the worker (i.e. in terms of skills and reliability) by the contractor. However, the contractor earns not based on a daily rate, but on profit made between the contract and the expenses necessary to bring it to completion. Worker's autonomy in negotiating with a contractor is directly proportional to their knowledge, as previously showed (§ 1.1.4). The more

²³ In Belize the minimum wage is 3.30 \$ (BCCI 2017). To have an idea of the cost of living in Belize, see the short list of commodity prices in the Appendix.

skilled a worker is, the more he is autonomous. In the small-scale construction industry, the difference between skilled worker and contractor can be porous, as a contractor could also have been a skilled worker in the past. In case he is unable to secure a project for some time, he can go back to piece rate work. While this is a relatively autonomous position, as the worker is in control of his own time, it still suggests a regression.

Secondly, autonomy is expressed on the worksite while labouring. Autonomy is related here to the worker's knowledge of techniques and the manifest refusal to accept an overly authoritarian hierarchy. The flow of instructions and tasks depends on the skill-based hierarchy, but is mediated by an egalitarian ethos. Due to the situational nature of construction work and its dependence on hand-tool technology adapted to the ever-changing nature and spaces of work, labouring is not regimented by strict spatial and temporal disciplinary frames as in, for instance, factory work. Therefore, workers exercise a degree of autonomy in terms of tasks and time on the construction site (which I expand upon in ch. 5).

These two points show that there is a degree of autonomy exercised by workers, and that the degree to which a worker is autonomous depends on their hierarchical position according to skills. The day labourer who does heavy tasks is at the lower end of this hierarchy, while the skilled worker who supervises others sits at the higher end. The most autonomous figure is the contractor, who is in control of his time, resources and workers, and for whom this autonomy is reflected in the nature of his earnings. In the next chapter I show how autonomy is understood in terms of movement within Belize City.

The workers are therefore in the position of being dependent upon an employer, who is 'his own boss', while understanding their condition of employment, labouring and interpersonal relationships in the workplace as relatively autonomous. While their degree of autonomy is hierarchically distributed according to skills, their relative autonomy is reinforced by an

egalitarian ethos (see ch. 5). I show below how this gradient relationship between the poles of autonomy and dependency, and hierarchy and equality, can also be traced in terms of labour conditions, psychological attitudes, and national and international politics.

1.2.2 Autonomy and slavery

The use of a vocabulary focused around slavery is common in Belize City and creates discursive links between occupation and social mobility. This vocabulary is used to express two main ideas: one which describes labour conditions, the other which explains socio-economic stagnation or lack of upward social mobility through reference to psychological attitudes.

The first idea is that contemporary labour (and life) conditions are a continuation of 'slavery days'. This is voiced mainly by poor Afro-descendant city dwellers, including those who are unskilled labourers. Therefore, it is an interpretation voiced from the perspective of subjects at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

The second, more diffuse understanding is centred on the seemingly unchanging prospects for many Belizeans at the bottom of this ladder. Some suggest that 'Belizeans are still under mental slavery,' arguing that poor Belizeans think that everything is due to them, and therefore lack the necessary will to find opportunities themselves and profit from them (see Fraser and Gordon 1994, for a genealogy of the term 'dependency' in relation to the morality and psychology of the colonized). For these people, poor Belizeans display a lack of entrepreneurial spirit originating from the psychological conditions of slavery. The idea of 'mental slavery' comes from a speech by the Jamaican Pan-African political leader Marcus Garvey (Garvey 1933, 346). Garvey visited Belize four times, where a local branch of the UNIA (i.e. Universal Negro Improvement Association, the organization founded by Garvey) was established in 1920. The UNIA headquarters in Belize City has stood the test of time, rebuilt after the 1931 hurricane (on

Garvey and Garveyism in Belize see Ashdown 1990, also 1981; Macpherson 2003). Garvey's words have been popularized and given resonance by the Jamaican singer Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song', which reproduced Garvey's speech. This vernacular social psychology therefore makes use of globally circulating Pan-Africanist ideas to make sense of social problems and attitudes.

The discourses around slavery stress dependency, both as a labour condition and as a psychological attitude. This links conditions of labour to a wider understanding of the failure of bettering one's condition by referring to the physical and mental condition of the slave. There use of these expressions seems to imply a schizophrenic condition: on one hand, the strive for independence and autonomy; on the other, an intrinsic impossibility of attaining these ideal states which is rooted in one's 'mind'. This understanding was prevalent for Belizeans who saw their conditions in terms of historical continuity. When contextualizing their condition in these terms, they were referring to themselves as 'black'. In positioning themselves using this category, they were deemphasizing otherwise important ethnic categories ('Creole') and the placement within a skin-complexion hierarchy ('dark', 'brown', 'light', 'red'), and accentuated a common condition linked to exclusion on racial grounds.

1.2.3 Autonomy and politics

Dependency is also seen to manifest itself in parliamentary politics. Politicians and candidates in Belize City commonly give cash to their constituents in the hope of getting votes in return²⁴. The Westminster model applied in Belize has resulted in a clientelist system which has its roots at the beginning of self rule (Shoman 1987; Vernon 2013). It becomes particularly salient before elections, especially at the national level. I was in

²⁴ Sometimes they also gave groceries, and following heavy rain which damaged many dwellings while I was on fieldwork, politicians also distributed building materials to private citizens.

Belize City during the 2015 national elections. The fervour was palpable and in the weeks before voting I witnessed constant discussions, door-to-door campaigning and rallies in the streets. A common discourse, particularly amongst poorer Belizeans, described a political elite which was dependant on the votes of their constituents during an election, but in turn made voters dependent upon them as clientele. The criticism of vote buying was almost ubiquitous, as a practice which made voters dependent on politicians for cash, and as a one-off payment after which the politician would 'disappear' for the five years before new elections. Sometimes, the one-off payment was divided for the number of days in five years to give an estimate of the actual daily gains of such a system. Usually, these very same critics were the people selling their votes or campaigning for one party or another. Elections were the time to ask and receive, I was told; soon, the games would be done and politicians would disappear again until the next elections. In conditions of material scarcity, the clientelist practices which were condemned in moral discourses were nonetheless accepted in practice.

Arguably, migrants who did not enjoy political rights in Belize (because they were undocumented or only residents, but not citizens) were not as impacted by the relationships with political representatives. This is not to say that they were completely outside of clientele logics: I have heard accounts of political brokerage for obtaining citizenship or permanent residency, and help from political figures to whom some contractors were linked. However, these cases were much less pronounced in migrant's experience, than the ways in which non-affluent Belizeans described their engagement with politicians in terms of mutual dependency of which they were the least beneficiaries.

1.2.4 Autonomy, coloniality and cash

The idea of dependency is tied to a post-colonial imaginary that draws upon historical memory and ideas of black consciousness (cf. Gilroy 2000). Dependency can be scaled from one-to-one interactions to the level of

national politics and, as I show below, to international political economy. A common discourse points to currency as evidence for the lack of independence of Belize as a country. 'Who's on our money? The Queen! She owns us!', at times accompanied by the observation that the currency is called the (Belizean) 'Dollar', a sign of another kind of (neo)imperialism originating from the United States of America. In the present discussion, I focus on discourses around cash, rather than money, as revealing ambivalent views on the national status. My analysis focuses on the ways in which autonomy/dependency are articulated within different contexts and with reference to various scales (psychological, related to work, national etc.) in the everyday interactions of Belize City dwellers. The meaningfulness of people's reflections generating from the everyday use of bills and coins is surely related to the significance of money which is stressed in anthropological analyses (see Maurer 2006), and not simply its tangible ubiquity as cash. In other words, currency's pervasive presence, but also money's persuasive dimension beyond particularistic meanings (Hart 2009). However, my focus here is on the relevance of discourses about cash that focus on its material and semiotic characteristics, in particular its 'head' as a symbol of political power (Hart 1986), as an instance of the ambivalent articulations of autonomy/dependency by the inhabitants of Belize City. I treat currency as a symbolic object around which varied understandings of the country's positionality in political and economic terms emerge from the point of view of its citizens. In other words, I adopt an ethnographic stance on currency while analytically examining the ambivalence of the discourses it engenders within the broader discussion of autonomy.



Figure 4 Belizean Dollars

In independent Belize, the everyday use of cash reminds citizens of their post-colonial status as subjects of the Queen of England (and Belize), whose face is on all national coins and paper bills (see Gilbert 2005 on iconography). The omnipresence of a *foreign* monarch on the *national* paper bills and coins can itself be seen as signifying an ambivalent national position as an independent state under the Commonwealth of Nations, especially when compared with the original political purpose of currency as a marker of independence (Graeber 2001, 103; cf. Strassler 2009). However, the Queen's image on cash gives rise to a more explicitly ambivalent interpretation of the country and its inhabitants' status: that because Elizabeth II is also the Queen of Belize (she's on the money), Belizeans are the Queen's children, and she would not abandon them in case of need. This sense of insecurity arises from the longstanding claims that neighbouring Guatemala exerts upon parts of Belizean territory.

British armed forces with deterrent functions left Belize in 1993, while maintaining a training presence.²⁵ A renewed and expanded British presence which took place during my fieldwork was generally viewed positively because of the employment opportunities it offered and because, while the army had not been deployed for national security reasons, its increased presence gave a sense of being under the Queen's protection (local newspapers also established this link, e.g. Parks 2015). During this time, the relations between Belize and Guatemala were tense (see, for instance, Agence France-Presse 2016), and present in everyday discussions as well as being heavily featured in local newspapers. Even though the story of the dispute and its current state of affairs is beyond the scope of this thesis (see Shoman 2018), it is important to note that the issue of military protection was at the heart of the transition to independence, since the small country lacked its own defence force (Shoman 2011). Notably, issues of military defence were also central in the transition from British Settlement to Crown Colony in 1871, with a substantial devolution of local political power but the acquisition of military protection (Bolland 1977, 191–93). This historically-rooted nexus between military protection and autonomy was identifiable in everyday commentaries on the Guatemalan dispute. Cash ethnographically condenses ambivalent discourses which describe Belize as benefitting from only a partial political autonomy from the former colonial power (and under the neo-colonial Northern American influence), and subject to a necessary degree of dependency upon the same power for protection from outside threats (ironically originating in the historical circumstances of Britain's colonialism).²⁶

²⁵ Stories of the times when the military were present in larger numbers could occupy a whole chapter. The presence of soldiers is still felt in Belize City. Around the neighbouring village of Ladyville, it is possible to pick up British radio signals, and the surrounding bars host British soldiers thirsty and looking for female company. In Belize City I was myself mistaken for one of them by a middle-aged woman shouting ironically 'My soldier love!' across the street, or a middle-aged man came over and greeted me with a 'Yes sir.' and a military salute.

²⁶ I could not help but see this duality also when buying cigarettes. The smoker has a choice between the locally produced 'Independence', with a strong taste (thus nicknamed 'Diesel') or the milder 'Colonial'.

This discursive link between autonomy and dependency with relations to cash was present among Belizeans born in the country, while I have not heard the same remarks from either recently arrived migrants or Belizean citizens born abroad. For recently arrived Central Americans, the Belizean Dollar's stability, its fixed rate with the US Dollar, and its exchange rate which is more favourable than their national currencies were positive attributes indicating the better economic situation of the country. Thus, the discourse around cash is more significant for people with a sense of continuous life-time attachment to the nation, who situated themselves clearly as post-colonial subjects with reference to the British role in shaping contemporary Belize. Central Americans did perceive Belize to be more stable, both economically and politically (cf. § 6.1.2), and reflected on the impact of international politics on their lives, but did not frame these discourses in terms of dependency and autonomy with reference to Belize's colonial status and its visual manifestation in cash.

1.3 Uncertainty: work and life

I began this chapter with a perspective strictly related to the realm of work, in which I showed the nexus between hierarchical structures and skill acquisition. I have then given a broader outlook in which, starting from the realm of work, I have more broadly explored the ambiguous relationship between autonomy and dependency as frames that subjects use to understand and value their positionalities. The aim of this last section is to link these two discussions. I do so focusing on work, specifically following Wallmann (1979, 2):

We need not only to ask [1] what activities are called "work" and [2] how their economic value is computed in that setting; [3] we need also to know which forms of work are, in that setting, thought to be socially worthy and personally fulfilling.

For builders, their work (1) involves the production of tangible objects, whereas contractor's work is managerial and entrepreneurial²⁷. Work's value (2) has been explored in the first section of this chapter, in which I suggested that work's value depends on skills. I will concentrate below on the third aspect stressed by Wallmann. Narotzky (2018, 40) observes that for many unemployed people, 'the value of work is very centrally its social aspect: being someone is tied to doing something that is recognized in some way as part of what society values' - to which we may add, following Wallman, what is 'personally fulfilling'²⁸.

The social and personal value of work, in this sense, can be understood through the articulations of flexibility and autonomy. It should be clear from the first part of the chapter that construction workers experience occupational fragmentation, the degree of which is dependent on the skill-based hierarchy. The industry's flexibility is distributed unevenly according to levels of skills possessed by workers. In the second part of the chapter, I stressed the relevance of autonomy as an aspirational condition, providing a lens through which to evaluate one's position with reference, among others, to labour condition and relations. Given the relevance of irregularity and uncertainty in terms of work, I will now articulate the nexus between forms of work and social and personal worth in terms of precarity.

The idea of "precarity" has been used initially in reference to the Global North to describe labour conditions in contexts of post-Fordist production. However, it has been recently argued that precarious conditions are normal in capitalism, rather than an exception (Casas-Cortés 2014; Neilson and Rossiter 2008), and have been recognized as longstanding characteristics of economic relations in the Global South (Narotzky 2018; Cross 2010). In Belize, stability of employment is largely limited to jobs in the public sector,

²⁷ See chapter 2 (in particular for the difference between waged and unwaged work) and chapter 5 for further perspectives.

²⁸ I do not imply that for builders the 'material productivist aspect' (Narotzky 2018, 40) of work is secondary (see ch. 2 and 5).

and the construction industry in particular tends to rely on casual labour. In this context of unexceptional casual and flexible labour, I use the term 'precarious' to describe these men's lives and work following Millar who, in the face of a proliferating use of the term, proposes to approach precarity 'as an open question about the relationship between forms of labor and fragile conditions of life' (Millar 2017, 7) in order to preserve its analytical purchase.

The question is whether flexibility, as a form of uncertainty, corresponds to a broader condition of precarity. For contractors, control over the labour force means autonomy over their own decisions. Contractors are entrepreneurs, they are 'their own bosses', and earn in terms of their capacity vis a vis the conditions of the 'market'. In contrast, workers have a 'boss' (*jefe*). They are dependent on contractors to determine when and where they can work, and for their salaries. Their earnings, while tied to contractor's capabilities in securing projects, do not result from their own financial investments as such. It is important to remember the distinctions made by builders between productive and managerial kinds of work. The latter becomes possible, according to the workers, because of the exploitation of the former. That is, contractors are autonomous because builders are not. The nexus of autonomy and dependency is thus ingrained in the nature of work.

A further distinction has to be made in terms of skilled workers and day labourers. Broadly, the former feels more autonomous than the latter. For skilled workers this feeling of relative autonomy has two dimensions. Firstly, they can potentially move to become small contractors in their own right, given their knowledge of both work and the market (cf. Scase and Goffee 1982, ch. 4, 5). However, this depends upon having financial means at their disposal. Carrying out independent piecework only grants a relative degree of autonomy as it involves a fixed piece rate, rather than substantial margins of profit. Secondly, skilled workers enjoy an autonomous position in the labouring process (see ch. 5).

Labourers, in contrast with skilled workers, have a lower and more intermittent income. Two factors make them comparatively more dependent than skilled workers. Firstly, they have less prospects of becoming skilled, and thus autonomous through their labour. This also reduces the possibilities of having a more substantial and (relatively) secure income. (Helpers also have a lower income than skilled workers, but are less insecure and have prospects of becoming skilled in the future.) Secondly, they have to seek outside wage employment to supplement their salaries. This exposes them to other forms of dependency (see ch. 2), with little prospect of change. Suffice to say, financial vulnerability exposes them to the kinds of political dependency mentioned above (§ 1.2.3), and more broadly in social terms (cf. ch. 3). Day labourers are dependent upon contractor's will as far as work is concerned. Flexibility means autonomy for contractors, but precarity for labourers. This is not only financial insecurity but also a recognisable lack of autonomy which workers stress with reference to their constant dependence upon someone else's needs, decisions and will (for a contrasting example cf. Gill 2001, 156).

Precarity also creates uncertainty in making plans for the future (Kofti 2016). Worker's engagement with long-term future plans is the subject of the last chapter. Here, I conclude the discussion on the entanglement of work and life, in particular the social and personal worth of work, with an analysis of what workers value and aspire towards in terms of their future horizons.

Contractors see their future prospects as related to their effort, and more strongly by market conditions, in the present. Prospects of getting ahead and making a profit were closely related to wider construction trends. During fieldwork, contractors saw their business as 'slow' because the market was 'going slow' (cf. Spyridakis 2016). For them, the future was conditioned by these circumstances and their abilities to navigate them as entrepreneurs. 'We, in construction, neither go down nor go up (*no bajamos y no subimos*), we are always in the middle! You always have to pay rent, and for your children', Matthew, a Guatemalan mason and tiler, summarized to me,

echoing other skilled workers in their forties who saw their position as substantially unchanging. After years of work, and establishing oneself as a tradesman, the possibilities of moving upward both strictly in terms of one's professional trade and more broadly in terms of social mobility are seen as locked.²⁹ Matthew's words also point to the stability of his position. Thus, when seen from the perspective of future prospects, skilled workers emphasized stability based on their position within irregular employment conditions. Apprentices saw the possibility of advancing within the industry in order to have better employment. Labourers with whom I worked, on the other hand, were more prone to emphasize the lack of possibilities for upward mobility, in both work and society at large. I often found that workers had a desire to establish some business venture on their own, though these ambitions were thwarted by their lack of funds.

This is not to say that skilled workers did not value the prospect of becoming a businessman. When taking into account their experience and current conditions, however, they were realistically evaluating their position as unlikely to do much better, but also in a reasonably stable position when compared with the unskilled workers. At the lower extreme, labourers saw their progression in the industry as unlikely. They suggested it was more likely that they would leave the industry than advance within it. While all workers experienced some degree of instability, this nonetheless entailed a stable future for skilled workers, with the prospect of enhancing one's stability by advancing in a trade in the case of apprentices, with both sides hoping to escape irregular employment by envisaging their futures as petty entrepreneurs in their own right (although this remained little more than an aspiration for most). Precarity was therefore experienced by labourers, rather than all workers. For labourers, this means a disposition towards the present. However, this is not a present orientation in terms of 'transience', freedom from the 'mainstream' attained by gaining autonomy from abundant wealth (Day, Papataxiarchis, and Stewart 1998). This is not to

²⁹ It is not to say that workers do not see working as a process of life-long learning.

negate the fact that labourers employ various strategies and skills in order to make ends meet. As I show, labourers draw from the urban milieu as a form of livelihood in creative and versatile ways (ch. 2). They also navigate kinship relationships in order to sustain themselves and their families (ch. 3). This however, should not divert attention from the consequences of their position in relation to work, that is, the resources utilized in conditions of scarcity should not obscure the scarcity of resources available (de la Rocha 2001).

However, I do not wish to oversimplify a relationship between kinds of work and aspirational capacity. As seen, age also is a relevant factor: apprentices tend to be younger than skilled workers. The former with a considerable life time to progress, the latter having spent considerable time learning a trade and reaping the benefits from their specialist knowledge. Even when having children dependent upon them, their gains are enough to provide for the family. Day labourers, especially those who are older and with responsibilities towards children, do not see their work as allowing them to sufficiently provide for their families (for the significance of the provision for children in terms of fatherhood see ch. 2). Other factors come into play. Those recently arrived migrants who had little or no previous experience in construction also had more optimistic perspectives on the future. I often heard the wish to 'be in a better financial situation' (*'tener una mejor economía'*), and conditions which would allow them to 'move upward' (*'salir adelante'*). The aspirational outlook of my Central American interlocutors was not unrelated to the desire of establishing a business one day. I often heard that the best possible future scenario would be 'having my own business' (*'tener mi propio negocio'*). The most common strategy, however, was to first establish one's position within the industry, and then think of freeing oneself from the dependency on an employer. Labourers, on their part, wished to break altogether with wage work.

Therefore, there is not a straightforward relationship between work and life prospects. Rather, different experiences including age, origins and familial

responsibilities play a role. I have also stressed the open-ended situation faced by most workers, who do not have a clear idea of their future trajectories. I talk about this 'experimentation' in the final chapter of the thesis, referring to a condition amongst recently arrived migrants of particular expectancy and openness in the present when looking towards the future. Moreover, there is a further dimension that nuances the discourse on autonomy. While recent migrants emphasized 'having my own business' as a desirable goal, Belizean residents stressed the appeal of 'being my own boss'. The emphasis on *having* and *being* points to a difference in the understandings of entrepreneurship for these people. For migrants, it is a means to an end: to have a business in order to have a better financial situation. For Belizean residents, it is an end in itself: to be in control of one's situation. This is not to say that the former does not value the autonomy of working for themselves, or the latter do not enjoy the economic gains that such a position would give them. However, the difference in emphasis shows how the aspirations are framed differently with autonomy as either a means or a goal. Rather than being unequivocally tied to one's conditions at work, future work conditions are understood and envisioned in terms of what is valued personally and socially. For labourers, this means that the desired escape from precarity is not found in regularity of employment, but rather in having control over one's work. Rather than 'cultural values' which influence economic behaviour, autonomy and dependence should be considered in epistemological terms as means to understand one's position and conditions more broadly. Seeing oneself through these lenses is to apply specific values to the relations which make up one's position, values which convey the significance of occupational and social mobility.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the hierarchical nature of the construction industry showing the relevance of skilled knowledge in terms of the relationships workers maintain between each other and with contractors. In detailing the ways in which this knowledge is evaluated, and in grounding

the relationships at work in terms of different levels of complementarity of interests, I have shown the connections between skills, employability, constancy of employment and prospects for occupational mobility. The chapter has then connected work with a broader conceptual frame in which autonomy and dependency are central for understanding and evaluating relationships and positionalities. Finally, in re-centering the discussion on work, I have shown the relevance of these discussions around autonomy and dependency in terms of the social and personal aspects of work with respect to uncertainty and precarity, as well as temporal aspects and social and occupational mobility.

In the next chapter, I expand upon this analysis by focusing on the spectrum of activities between waged and wageless work that labourers undertake from the perspective of their daily movements within the urban milieu of Belize City.

Chapter 2. Catch and kill

'Hard time!
Catch and kill!
Hand to mouth!'

Mime 'King Kerob' Martinez, "Hard Time Catch and Kill"

This chapter concerns the work of day labourers whose conditions have been previously described in relation to the hierarchy, labour relations and work conditions of the small-scale construction industry in Belize City. By relating this context to ideas of autonomy and independence as expressed by the city dwellers, the previous chapter has elucidated the nexuses between work conditions and life aspirations. This chapter expands on the aforementioned analysis by ethnographically situating the daily movements of labourers within the urban milieu of Belize City. It follows Dylan, the unskilled worker encountered in the vignette of the previous chapter, in his efforts to make a living.

In particular, the chapter revolves around a mode of livelihood called 'Catch and Kill' (*Kech ahn Kil* in Belizean Kriol). The expression has been used with the meaning of relying upon multiple sources of income in conditions of scarcity since at least five generations ago, possibly deriving from hunting practices, and is today commonly heard in Belize City in particular and some 'creole' villages (mostly situated in Belize District) (personal communication, Myrna Manzanares, 21/06/2018). In its contemporary usage, 'catch and kill' can be defined as a man's fluctuating engagement in diverse economic activities, none of which has a fixed duration in time³⁰. These activities may be the only source of income allowing a man to support himself or his family,

³⁰ The expression has a specific gendered character: it is only used for men.

and even then may not provide a viable livelihood. The construction industry provides many opportunities for work to be 'caught'. When employment is found, it usually lasts for a single day, or a few days at a time. The metaphorical meaning of the expression is commonly understood: the work is soon 'killed' after it has been 'caught,' and the hunt begins for the next job.

The chapter begins by tackling the quest for employment. Through juxtaposing the movement of those who catch and kill, whom I call 'urban hunters', and contractors, I show how the mobilities of the two are linked while signifying precarity and dependence for the former, and autonomy for the latter. While moving on foot, labourers simultaneously look for employment and other income generating opportunities. Movement is thus pivotal for making a living and situates urban hunters within the social fabric of the city, necessitating knowledge not recognized in the labour market and a gendered bodily practice. Catch and kill encompasses both wage work and *hustling*. The social connotations of the two, and the conditions of life their conjunction entail, situates labourers in an ambiguous social position which does not correspond to a clear positive status and recognition of personal autonomy. This ambiguity is reflected in the lack of a distinct catch and kill identity. Urban hunters instead identify themselves in terms of wage labour. The chapter concludes accounting for the sense of pride in productive labour in the construction industry as it is recognized while moving in the city.

2.1 Catching a job

A key characteristic of catch and kill is that it is a mobile form of livelihood. Movement is inherent in the logic of the construction industry: once the work on one particular site is finished, the workers move on to another site. Since the workplace is not fixed, a contractor and a set of workers inevitably move from one site to the next. The movement of contractors and urban hunters is inextricably linked, although substantially different in nature. For those who catch and kill, this mobility is more apparent because each instance of

employment lasts for a short time. Thus, the spatial fragmentation of employment opportunities corresponds to increased movement for labourers.

Most of the time, for labourers finding work by visiting worksites means going to the outskirts of the city, or just beyond its western limits and starting to walk to look for construction sites (Map 4). Frequent urban and inter-urban buses depart from Belize City's bus terminal towards the west. The Phillip Goldston Highway originates in the city and terminates at the border with Mexico, passing through areas that are developing in terms of real estate (targeting the affluent classes) and extends into the nearby village of Ladyville (Map 4). As the city develops towards the west, the construction of private houses is highly likely to continue in these areas. Following the same route that Dylan and I took when we went to build the fence, taking a fifteen to twenty-minute bus ride for 1.5 \$, the average worker gets off the bus and scopes out construction sites where his labour might be required.

This form of seeking occupation can be rewarding, but can also involve wasting a morning and a few dollars for the bus fare, sweating under the sun on the often unpaved and dusty roads. A more targeted way to find employment is through a known contractor, skilled worker or another occasional labourer. Sometimes, those who need maintenance work on their property may simply ask around their neighbours who may appreciate a chance to earn some extra money.

However, the quest for jobs also involves constant enquiring. While walking within the city, it is common to bump into fellow workers, and therefore to ask if 'anything is coming up!?' Any encounter is an occasion to ask, and any movement results in new possibilities in terms of meeting a familiar face, and getting information about potential work opportunities. Both walking around to find potential worksites, and enquiring about work in construction

while moving about the city, highlight how important movement is for the unskilled workers in order to find employment.

For contractors, transporting materials, tools and labourers also demands movement on a day basis, particularly when a contractor supervises more than one site. To find work is also related to movement in their case. A contractor has to survey sites and meet land and house owners, and be always prepared for when someone asks about his services. Moving around for work also seems to be self-perpetuating, in the sense that work which demands mobility also fosters the kinds of social interactions which themselves generate information and opportunities for future work across the city. In this way, the work demands movement, or as Pete, a contractor in his late forties, said, 'it moves you from place to place', which was, for him at least, a source of enjoyment:

De more yo move around de more people de approach you. And sometimes de people de a see di work and se: 'Gimme yo number', yo know. Ih nice man, dad da why Ah like bout it, Ah no stay.

An then weh Ah like always...Ah like dis ting of being your own boss, you feel most a de time. Bikaa, you know somtaim when yo go da work for chree weeks dat don! Mek a nice lee money you gwaan a week break, sometimes two weeks and I still good! Yu got time for family, an all. Ah like to take control of di sichyuayshan, ah noh like sichyuayshan weh noh noh hav kanchroal. And so, dat I like it. But I naturally love it too man.³¹

³¹ More you move around more people approach you. And sometimes the people see the work and say: 'Give me your number', you know. It's nice man, that's what I like about it, I don't stay [in one place]. And then what I always liked...I like this thing of being your own boss, you feel it most of the time. Because, you know sometimes when you work for three weeks that's it! Make a nice little money and you go for a week break, sometimes it's two weeks and I'm still ok! You've got time for your family, and other things. I like to take control of the situation, I don't like a situation that I cannot control. And so, that's what I like about it. But I love it [i.e. the work] also genuinely.

For those who catch and kill, looking for work – or hunting for it, according to the metaphor – also involves moving to different sites in order to inquire about the need for extra pairs of hands. Catch-and-killing not only comprises hunting a job, and killing it soon after; it also implies that the prey is consumed in the aftermath. There is nothing left of the game, and the hunter needs to seek anew. Dylan summarized poignantly: 'The money we make is just to take us back to work for the next week. Right!? That's the only money we make.' This stands in contrast with the freedom the contractor quoted above enjoyed in having 'a week break' because he was his 'own boss', and because he made a 'nice little money' which afforded him the luxury of not needing to seek new projects immediately. He had control of his time, deciding when to work and when to take a break, because he did not have to work for someone else.

In this context, the idea of personal autonomy, of being your 'own boss', plays a pivotal role in positive self-evaluation as I detailed in the previous chapter. In particular, Browne's (2004) study in Martinique showed how autonomy constitutes a shared value achieved through participation in entrepreneurial ventures across class lines. While I found that autonomy was valued positively by day labourers and contractors alike, for contractors, the organizational and temporal aspects of construction work allowed them to satisfy their desires for control and personal autonomy in ways which were not possible for other workers. For those who catch and kill, the metaphorical violence involved in constantly 'killing' their means of survival translates into the impossibility of claiming autonomy over one's work. Metaphorically there is a suggestion that it is the labourer who catches a job, and himself kills it. However, we cannot take the implications of this metaphor literally. Labourers emphasize that the constancy of the hunt is related to the fragmentation of work *and* the scarce gains that it generates. Labourers 'catch' a job for the most part: they look to be employed, rather than being sought by employees. The situation is reversed in the case of most skilled workers. 'Catching', is a form of unpaid work: labourers themselves spend time and constitute a constantly available workforce: they

'just pass through' worksites, as noted in chapter 1. However, those who 'kill' the job are not labourers. The job is terminated by contractors who employ labourers according to the labour they provide, which is ingrained in the organizational nature of the industry (the ways in which it functions in terms of skills and relationships has been detailed in the previous chapter). Juxtaposing the divergent practices of labourers and contractors involves not only noting the contrasting consequences for the two in terms of work conditions and related values, it also involves stressing their mutual entanglement. The intermittent nature of the work, the constant movement that it generates and its temporal fragmentation, grant autonomy for contractors over when and where to work. For labourers the same characteristics signify a constant uncertainty and dependency.

Therefore, the life and work of those who catch and kill can be described as precarious. As we have seen, the uncertainty generated by an industry which constantly moves around the city is not necessarily a condition for precarity; neither it is possible to equate casual labour with precarity (see ch. 1). Rather, the experience of mobility is understood by contractors as providing a positive sense of autonomy, whilst for labourers the same mobility is seen as creating dependencies. Mobility, then, can index precarity for the unskilled workers in ways which do not apply for the contractors. Notably, these two understandings result from different kinds of work: productive and managerial. The latter becomes possible, according to the workers, because of the exploitation of the former. Day labourers find themselves at the bottom of the productive work hierarchy, being the most precarious amongst the workers with little prospect for upward mobility. Movement, and the various ways in which it is understood, are therefore indexical of precarious conditions. In continuing to interrogate the relationships between labour and life, I turn now to the non-waged work – including the movement required to find a job – undertaken by those who catch and kill.

2.2 Moving in the city

Work in the construction industry is fluctuating and intermittent. The daily rate of pay for a labourer is the lowest in the industry and employment is sporadic. Moreover, as suggested by those who catch and kill, and by contractors themselves, the kind of income generated by catching and killing can only satisfy basic needs. It excludes the possibility of accumulation; as many workers emphasize, they live from hand to mouth. Therefore, working as a labourer is not the only, and rarely the main form of income.

For instance, Dylan ran errands when any neighbour asked, and sold clothes (mainly second hand) for neighbours who were importing from them the US or from the Corozal free zone.³² It was not uncommon for people around the area to sell clothes, jewelry and other small items. At home or on the street it was typical to be offered, for instance, a hat, t-shirt, necklace, or a used fan. However, this did not provide a stable occupation for Dylan and others like him, and the earnings were slim. Opportunities like this would come up from time to time, but were neither a secure nor reliable income generating activity. Besides this, actively panhandling, asking relatives for small sums of money, and asking the local political representative for cash, or even food or building materials³³, provided other avenues through which material resources were attained.

These strategies, rather than being incidental to occasional work in construction, were integral to catch and kill. All these activities, and in general any income generating strategy that is not a stable job, are commonly understood as hustling – ‘*hosl*’ in Belizean Kriol. Thus, the one who catches and kills ‘is systematically engaged in a number of gainful

³² The Commercial Free Zone (CFZ) at Corozal (Belize), is a tax-free trade area on the border with Mexico.

³³ During general elections, each of the 31 constituencies of Belize elects an Area Representative to the House of Representatives (Belize City has 10 constituencies). Especially in the city, political patronage and clientelism are central to electoral politics (Vernon 2013).

activities, which for him form an integrated economic complex' (Comitas 1973, 157). Comitas (Ibid.) labelled this 'occupational multiplicity or plurality', in his critique of the use of the exclusive categories of peasant and farmer in defining the Jamaican rural population. The concept and its variants, such as 'occupational fluidity' (Trouillot 1988, 31), have been used to describe different economic practices in the Caribbean (Browne 2004, 78; Ulysse 2007, 204). Carnegie (Carnegie 1987a, 2002, 106–11), expanded the concept, reformulating it in terms of 'strategic flexibility':

First, it describes a detached, relaxed stance of lying in wait, an attitude of expectancy, from which one can move deftly to take advantage of whatever comes along. Second, it depicts the actual building of multiple options, potential "capital" to hedge against future insecurity. (2002, 106)

However, it is not insuring oneself against a possible 'future insecurity' that leads these labourers to multiple income-generating strategies; it is rather a lack of finances in the present. Instead of a future-oriented strategy, catch and kill is a present-oriented disposition. Dylan stressed this point: 'Life is hard here. We don't live for tomorrow, we live for today'. The present oriented disposition, underscored by the fragmentary and contingent nature of the many activities undertaken to make ends meet, brings with it a static vision of the future, in the sense that the future is not envisioned as different than the present (see § 1.3 for a discussion). Moreover, as seen above, day labourers do not share in the working advantages of the apprentice system. In terms of labour relations, the day labourer, with his focus on the present, can be contrasted with the helper, who is oriented towards the future (Gill 2001, 158). Furthermore, in catch and kill there a receptiveness to any unexpected possibilities that might arise. Rather than 'lying in wait', the labourer takes on an attitude of kinaesthetic vigilance. No wonder, *hosl* also means to act animatedly or speedily. Being '*pan di move*' ('on the move') is a way of making a living. The salience of the present moment – the attention to opportunities in the here and now – is evident in looking at the mobile

practices constitutive of catch and kill and is suggested by its metaphorical meaning.

Indeed, looking for employment may often take place alongside other economic activities. For instance, while trying to sell an item, a person might ask for a dollar from a wealthier pedestrian, or unexpectedly meet a former colleague and enquire about any available employment opportunities. If movement by contractors around the city fosters social networks useful for their business, then those who catch and kill also benefit from city-wide connections for economic opportunities; however, the economic benefits of mobility are not restricted to the latter's work in construction per se. Asking about income opportunities in the construction industry and being involved in other kinds of income-generating strategies come hand in hand through movement.

While encounters can be fortuitous, it would be wrong to assume that hunting in the city happens randomly. Urban hunters are well aware of how to navigate the city, where to go in order to increase their chances of finding something within the spectrum of activities in which they are engaged simultaneously, as well as potential limits on their movements. I often walked with Dylan around the city. His chosen itinerary would lead him to hail someone at home, passing through a spot where he knew a certain person could be found, and to stop at a shop owned by an acquaintance who might buy a small item, for instance a golden necklace or a bar of laundry soap, he was trying to sell. At the same time, I became aware of the fact that longer routes were carefully selected to avoid possible encounter with gang members hostile to the group from his own turf, or that we were changing the return itinerary home in order to avoid facing 'someone who maybe is waiting for us'. Some areas are more fruitful when looking for construction work, notably the western parts of the city. Other areas are inaccessible because of possible threats from gang members. Still others are too distant to be covered on foot, so the labourer must first get a bus and then start to walk around. Acquaintances and relatives are also scattered

around the city (more on this in the following chapter), some live nearby whilst others may live in distant neighbourhoods. While some areas have a strong class-based identity, most of the city's neighbourhoods are mixed in socio-economic terms and the transition between areas are smooth rather than strikingly obvious. Thus, relatives and acquaintances with different levels of affluence are situated in different parts of Belize City.

The knowledge of contingent opportunities, possibilities and dangers is acquired through living in the city: walking thus becomes a way of knowing (cf. Ingold and Vergunst 2008). This kind of knowledge is also tied to one's biography – one's history of residing in the city – through being associated with a particular area and having ties to people that work and live in the city. As Wolch and Rowe (1992) suggest in the case of homeless mobility patterns in Los Angeles County (US), the daily routes taken around the city exist in a dialectic relationship with life trajectories and are influenced by the nature of the urban environment. In the following chapters, I expand this observation by showing the relevance, for long-term residents and recently arrived workers, of the varying significance of time spent in the city.

Over time, the number of acquaintances that I made grew both around my area of residence and in other parts of the city, and I gradually learned that the best way of gathering data for my thesis was to increase the possibilities of encounters by passing through spots where I could engage with a familiar person, or going to people's homes to 'check pon dem' (check how they are doing, i.e. visit) and have a chat. Therefore, I started to move around the city as a way of increasing my chances of bumping into people, deciding routes in order to maximise these potential encounters even when I was going somewhere for mundane reasons, such as shopping at the market. At the same time, I began to avoid certain areas, taking alternative paths or moving from one street to another, walking along the edges of canals rather than using the available roads, to evade some neighbours who would ask for money as they got used to my presence. I also had to move around within the city according to the relationships that I had established over time, in

order to seek more material for my thesis or to avoid being hustled myself as an outsider who was economically relatively stable (see ch. 3).



Figure 5 Canals can be shortcuts between streets

It is fruitful to look at the opportunities and limitations (in the sense of itinerary, rather than immobility) related to movement by describing catch and kill as a 'spatial practice' (Lefebvre 1991, 8). For Lefebvre (Ibid.) A spatial practice is a projection of 'social practice' in space. Catch and kill situates the labourer within social relationships scattered in the city. Thus, moving while hunting reflects movements within relationships that hold economic potential, sought or avoided according to circumstances. These encounters in turn foster new relationships: movement in space happens according to sociality, and spatially reproduces this sociality. Possibilities of movement unveil a 'social space' that results from actions of the past and 'permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others' (Ibid. 1991, 73). The physicality of the social space will be the object of the last section of this chapter. As seen, relations are created through lived experiences in the city, and find their spatial referents through the homes and neighbourhoods of other city dwellers. From this perspective,

these 'hunts' reveal the possibilities of, and obstacles to, making a livelihood in the city whilst 'weav[ing] places together' (de Certeau 1984, 97). For de Certeau (1984), through the act of walking the pedestrian selectively creates articulation between places – generates space as 'a practiced place' (de Certeau 1984, 117). From the point of view its spatial social referents, the movement of the one who catches and kills actualizes a subjective knowledge of the socio-spatial differences of the city, at the same time revealing how these differences are navigated in practice. This suggests a less fragmented and entrenched view of people and neighbourhoods in Belize City, in comparison with other Caribbean cities where neighbourhoods are divided and inward-looking, their residents keeping to their own areas (Jaffe, de Bruijne, and Schalkwijk 2008, 7–10)³⁴. Exploring wage labour in terms of mobility helps us to understand the nexus between hierarchy in the construction industry (and immobility within it) and what these conditions entail in terms of the experience of living in the city: any movement oriented towards income opportunities situates labourers in the social fabric of the city.

These movements happen within the public spaces of the city: on the streets. In the literature on the urban Caribbean, male presence in the streets is usually portrayed as groups of men 'killing time' at street corners, a practice called 'liming' (see Eriksen 1990; Lieber 1976; McClish 2016). However, this emphasis on liming (and broadly on the street as 'a recreational arena' [Chevannes 2000, 125]) as an ethnographic vantage point has meant that even when inhabiting the streets involves 'a mobile style which finds men moving from scene to scene in an attempt to discover what is happening where' (Lieber 1976, 327), movement is between otherwise static 'scenes'. This, together with the characterization of public

³⁴ Perhaps the real estate developments towards North-West points to a more segregated future for Belize City. While moving through the northern part of the city the changes are somehow gentle, the newly built Chetumal Street Bridge (the last towards the interior) strikingly connects cement houses fitted with security systems with stilt wooden houses on mosquito-infested swamps.

spaces as the domain of males,³⁵ in contrast to the female-oriented yard, has contributed to a specific gender-based understanding of movement. The movement involved in catching and killing, however, shifts the stress from moving in between groups (at spots, on corners, in stores), to a broader sense of constant, productive motion within the city. Rather than this view of male social relations worked out on the streets between peer-groups, catch and kill reveals how moving itself involves navigating social relations within the city's fabric. In this context, male sociality is manifested through movement in the city within dispersed dyadic relationships of economic significance, rather than in the peer-group (as emphasized in the literature).

This is not to say that moving around the city escapes gendered dynamics, which becomes evident in the bodily presence of its inhabitants. On one hand, contractors often move on board a pick-up truck whilst wealthier inhabitants have their own cars. Being inside a vehicle offers a degree of separation from the street, and many car-owners take a great deal of care in their vehicles' appearance. The need to keep their cars shiny supplies another opportunity for hustling, as they request a specific person to wash them manually, or pass by spots where men eagerly await customers with their buckets of water. However, those who catch and kill cannot afford a car (sometimes not even a bicycle). They move around the city on foot (and only occasionally taking a bus), without the car to act as a buffer between them and the street.

Posture and gaze play an important role when walking. There is a specifically male, heterosexual model for appropriate self-presentation when walking the streets: hands outside the pockets, looking straight ahead, keeping a straight spine and chest pushed to the front, and a firm and steady core (minimizing movement of the hips, negatively associated with femininity and male homosexuality) in order to project one's bodily confidence with the

³⁵ The observation that 'The street is masculine, and men belong to it' (de Moya 2004, 77), is exemplary of the longstanding gendered understanding of street (and public spaces) in the Caribbean (e.g. P. J. Wilson 1971).

space. This also involves raising the head, eyes looking straight ahead, but vigilant to whatever happens around. Even when a familiar face is just out of vision, a quick exchange of '*Weh di gwaan*' ('How is it going?') or a yelled 'Yaaa! Yaaa!' (maybe supplemented by the name or nickname of the person to whom they are referring and an occasional raise of hand) constitutes a mutual recognition. Moving involves both making one's presence known, verbally and bodily, and a constant 'screening' of the street³⁶. The alertness to possibilities and threats in the surroundings, or kinaesthetic vigilance on which success of hunts (and security of the hunter) depends, is thus grounded in personal (subjective) topographies as well as in a gendered bodily practice and gaze.

The motivations and needs of the ethnographer stress his privileged position when compared with those who catch and kill, as one is looking for thesis material while the other for the means to buy an evening meal; the former ignores annoying requests, the latter avoids physical danger. However, I wish to emphasize that because of my extraneous position as labourer and Belize City ethnographer-resident, both learning to navigate the city and labour within it (cf. Wardle 2000, 122 in reference to Lieber, 1976, 333) led me to have insights on the significance of these processes from the perspective of a stranger who became (and often failed at being) an apprentice (cf. Prentice 2008). The labourer who catches and kills needs the kinds of bodily knowledge that allows for spatial navigation of the urban environment, in addition to the basic skills employed in construction work. The resilience and creativity in making a living turns the day labourers who catch and kill into bricoleurs. They use what is at hand, not following a project from start to finish, but rather acting according to their own skills and the available possibilities at a given moment based on contingencies (Lévi-Strauss 2004, 16–22). Unlike most of the labouring skills detailed in chapter 1, the aforementioned abilities are not recognized nor sold of their

³⁶ I became even more aware of these elements once back from fieldwork. The first time I went at an open-air event I felt paranoid because I was unable to account for the large crowd around me. Also, my partner ironically noted that my posture was excessively 'masculine'.

own accord in the labour market. Thus, both labourer's work in construction and hustling (see below), are fruitfully described as informal for their irregularity, unpredictability and lack of control (Hart 2006). Through catch and kill, labourers actively navigate between waged and wageless activities spatially and temporally (as we have seen so far) as well as relationally and in terms of their reputation (as I show below).

Contractors and work hunters are both constantly '*pan di move*' to make a living. For those who catch and kill, however, this is a 'survival' matter and involves a plethora of activities beyond construction. Finding employment involves mobility – as the work seeker needs to go to construction sites, or ask around for work – in the same way that other income generating strategies described as *hosl* also demand constant motion. Movement in the city is integral to catching and killing; trying to hunt while standing still is ineffective (cf. Ordóñez 2015). The encounters resulting from moving in the urban space might seem chaotic and merely fortuitous at a glance, but over the longer term it becomes clear that they are the outcomes of an 'action topography' (Lieber 1976, 326) based on a knowledge of possibilities and restrictions gained through years of living in the city.



Figure 6 Streets of Belize City

2.3 Hustling

Hustling describes more generally the effort of making a living by any means, taking advantage of whatever opportunity available. Once, a small-time contractor in his mid-forties explained to me, smiling: 'We have to look after the work! If anything is available we take it, if not someone else will! I have my family, you know, I have to hustle!' In this case, the contractor's capacity of taking advantage of any gainful opportunity by the means of securing a contract is also included, with some irony, in the hustle category. Moreover, the semantic reach of hustling includes politicians and government officials involved in unlawful practices aimed at personal gain. In fact, it is common to read about 'land hustle' (*The Reporter* 2016), 'visa hustle' (*Amandala* 2015) or 'passport hustle' (*Amandala* 2017) in Belizean newspapers. As seen (ch. 1), making profit by exploiting someone else's labour also can be described as hustling. That said, hustling is mainly associated with the income-generating practices of people who struggle to make ends meet. In this context, hustle partially overlaps with catch and kill, but some of the negative connotations of hustling (e.g. the public servants' wrongdoings) are excluded from catch and kill. Hustling is not in direct opposition to wage work, as argued by Wacquant (1998) in reference to the Chicago black ghetto: catch and kill comprehends both hustling and wage employment.

There is a degree of identification between being involved in catching and killing and hustling. This link, however, is not made at the level of self-identification. Those who make their living this way describe their activity ('I catch and kill/hustle'), but do not identify with it ('I am a catch and killer/hustler'). In the case of someone else defining their activities, catch and kill remains on the level of activity description ('he catches and kill' but not 'he's a catch and killer'), while people who hustle can be characterized as hustlers.

It is neither deplorable nor laudable to catch and kill; the term does not carry with it a moral judgement. However, as the wealth obtained by catching and killing is insufficient when considering one's offspring, the evaluation of those who catch and kill, as well as of the women who choose men engaged in this kind of work as partners, can be negative. Notably, it is seen as a sign of the failure to fulfil paternal responsibilities when catching and killing means that a man finds it difficult to provide for his family. These judgements also imply that a woman 'chooses her man' without much thought (inverting the gender of the choice maker in contrast to what was observed by Chevannes [2000, 60]). Moreover, catch and kill is largely, but not exclusively, associated with men of African descent. The stereotype of the (poor) 'black' man who is lazy and reluctant to work is, at times, associated with catching and killing. Therefore, for those with a higher socio-economic status, a person's condition is often not seen as a result of one's biography or structural conditions; instead, it can signal one's (un)willingness to work.

Recognition that someone is a hustler can come from someone with a (relatively) stable job position. During a conversation with a friend who worked as a security guard, I was talking about my encounters with a man in his late fifties who mainly lived by collecting used glass bottles and entertaining tourists with historical facts and anecdotes about Belize. I had sympathy for the man, and was amused by his rhetoric, so I was surprised when my friend cut me short in a disparaging tone: 'He!? He's the biggest hustler!'. Connotations can also be positive between two persons of a similar socioeconomic standing, involved in the same 'ghetto life'. For instance, a former gang member in his thirties who lived in my neighbourhood once pointed to a teenage male who I used to see coming in and out of the surrounding alleys: 'He hustle in the street. He's good! Always find a way to make money!', he said to me approvingly. The sociological and anthropological literature on Caribbean and North American urban contexts has referred rather descriptively to hustling. Exceptionally, Venkatesh writes in reference to Chicago's poor housing development project where he

conducted fieldwork that hustle is 'not only a practice with particular salience in ghetto spaces but also a perceptual frame.' (2002, 93) Therefore, since hustling and catch and kill are both survival strategies, they are seen positively amongst others from the same socioeconomic background.³⁷ The moral attitudes towards these activities therefore reveal a speaker's social positioning. In these terms, the general consensus that public servants and politicians' hustle is negative, can be read from the speakers' point of view in terms of the politicians' privileged proposition of responsibility towards 'the people'.

So far, we have looked at the social aspects related to this form of livelihood. How do these social aspects relate to personal fulfilment for those who catch and kill? It is necessary to return to the relationship between wage and wageless forms of income. As seen, wage-earning is central to catch and kill: otherwise it would be simply described as hustling. The stress on physical input in construction, to 'work hard', is positively recognized by fellow workers (see § 4.2, 5.4). On a personal level, this hard work translates into pride in the material outputs of labour, as I show in the next section. Hard work is more generally evaluated as socially positive and transformative³⁸. Wageless work, specifically hustling, has a more ambiguous connotation that is dependent on social status. As previously stressed, for those who catch and kill both being engaged in heavy duty tasks and hustling demand a constant and laborious effort. For some, this means of livelihood hangs in the balance between legitimate and criminal activities.

³⁷ They are not associated with the cross-class values of cleverness and independence (cf. Browne 2004)

³⁸ As part of different institutional attempts to stop gang-related crime in Belize, the national Government had in previous years employed young Belizeans at risk of gang recruitment in labour intensive jobs in construction. The discourse saw 'hard work' as a disciplining practice, so much that barrel mixing was preferred to trucks because allowing more people to be employed. The director of the company employing these men emphasized: 'we found that mixing concrete is a great way to employ those guys. They love that type of work, it's hard work and they just love it.' (Channel 5, 2011).

Legitimate activities (though not formal) are said by labourers to produce earnings which will be spent more carefully than the 'easy money' earned criminally, which is spent quickly because it has been earned without 'sweating'. Graeber, discussing Marx take on money as the desired end of action, summarized: 'In money, workers see the meaning or importance of their own creative energies, their own capacity to act, and by acting to transform the world, reflected back at them.' (2001, 67) Here, there is a qualitative representation of value in the sense that different kinds of labour are reflected in different kinds of money. It is useful to note that money is understood as having effects which derive from the kind of labour from which it is earned. Illegal gains give rise to 'easy' money (acquired quickly and without physical effort), which is equally spent 'easily' (cf. Gamburd 2004). The effort to procure it is not felt and at the same time easily leads to possible conflicts which threaten personal security or freedom: who will provide for the children then? However, economic gains are scarce, and even reluctant fathers are forced to take other avenues which might lead to problems with the law, simply in order to make ends meet.

Sporadic employment in unskilled and low skilled occupations, especially in construction work, and the consequences of failing to provide for offspring have been directly linked with gang involvement in Belize City (Gayle, Hampton, and Mortis 2016, 193). In spite of the efforts of hard work, the scarcity of resources available by legitimate means, notwithstanding the efforts they require, can lead to a negative social evaluation based on the ideas of masculine parenthood. In short, alive and out of jail, fathers can be nonetheless bad fathers because they cannot provide. Catch and kill, rather than having an unequivocal personal and social recognition, subsumes varying personal and social ways in which work is valued. It is understood as including different kinds of work, which do not give rise to a particular kind of occupational identity. Nonetheless, when we consider how kinds of work which are behind it are evaluated by the actors involved, catch and kill is considered on a whole as a constant effort to produce legitimate earnings.

Within the literature on the Caribbean more generally, the flexibility of engaging in multiple economic activities has been linked to the attainment of autonomy (Carnegie 1987a; Mintz 1989; Harrison 1988; Mantz 2007; Trouillot 1992). However, the working and living conditions of those who catch and kill suggest the contrary: a constancy in falling short and being dependent. Having now expanded upon the discussion from chapter 1 to consider work outside construction, such as hustling, now it is possible to return to the relationship between precarious work and life. Millar's (2014) work with Brazilian garbage dump collectors (*catadores*) offers a comparative case. When *catadores* go back to wageless work in the dump, Millar argues that they return to stable and constant source of income. Their inability to adapt to wage labour is ascribed to a lifestyle characterised by daily emergencies. Returning to the dump is therefore claiming what Millar calls 'relational autonomy' (2014, 47).³⁹ Leaving wage labour corresponds to an 'act of release' (Ibid. 49), which permits a different way of shaping life and work. Caught in between wage labour and unsalaried work, those who catch and kill do not have the means to effectively claim an autonomous and fulfilling livelihood in this sense. This also contrasts with the freedom Gill (2001) ascribes to mainly single Japanese day labourers who lived detached from their families in specific city districts. For labourers who catch and kill, even within their socioeconomic sphere, where social recognition as men earning a wage by legitimate means is at times possible, gendered social expectations such as the need to earn money to provide for a family work against the possibility of acquiring status or feeling autonomous.

As seen, the participation in criminal activities is linked more with economic and social consequences, than with a rationale which distinguished between licit and illicit on moral grounds (cf. Roitman 2006). By being marginal in the construction industry, yet choosing not to engage in illicit activities, those who catch and kill are excluded from acquiring both a trade-based and from a 'street-wise' status. At the same time, they integrate irregular wages with

³⁹ See the next chapter for a discussion of the relationships with one's neighbours in terms of dependencies.

fluctuating income. This results in a constant feeling of dependency upon others, and the difficulty to provide for those who are, in turn, dependent upon them (i.e. one's children, see also ch. 3).

2.4 Back to work again

One evening Dylan and I were sitting in front of his building sipping a stout and enjoying the breeze, when Leo came by and joined us. He was in his early thirties, a neighbour and old friend of Dylan. The two grew up in the same alley, and had also worked together in the past. We concealed our bottles as soon as two police officers appeared on foot at the end of the street. Soon after, they stopped and enquired about our identities, addresses, and occupations. I spelled my name for them to write it down (anticipating a request to clarify my name letter-by-letter), gave my address and specified that I was a student. This caused the female officer to raise her eyebrow, and led to further questions from her male colleague. Leo said that he was a 'construction worker', and Dylan asserted that he was a 'labourer', and gave a false surname – 'You know, I don't want them to say: "Oh! We have been looking for you for a long time, come with us!"' he explained, laughing afterwards. The formality of the police questions required a formal work-related identification: neither hustler nor catcher and killer qualified as such. The two law enforcement officers left to continue patrolling the area, and we were all surprised that no searching took place (as we agreed that they must have thought: 'What would a white boy do with two black men if not something illegal?'). The conversation topic shifted, and Leo shared some useful information with Dylan. At the beginning of the tourist season, Leo started to sell fresh coconut water just outside the tourist village of Belize City, not too far from the area where licensed street vendors were operating. By collecting coconuts from friend's yards, he established a small business operating intermittently on the days on which cruise ships docked in Belize City. Despite the small bribes he was handing over to the tourist police in order to work without a license, at a certain point he was forbidden from vending (cf. S. Gregory 2007, ch. 2). Having his small

enterprise shut down, he had been looking for other ways of making a living. He told Dylan about a contractor in need of labourers for a project in a wealthy western neighbourhood. The two went to meet this contractor the following day, only to be sent home with the (ultimately unfulfilled) promise of being called up at a later date with an offer for work. 'You have to write about this Joseph⁴⁰, is not that we don't want to work, is the system!', Dylan urged me, going against the commonly-held view that unwillingness to work was the cause of unemployment.

There is an understanding that hustling and catching and killing do not constitute 'jobs', are not a trade, and therefore do not constitute an occupational identity. Being a labourer (or construction worker), however, does grant a professional identity even if this is not one's only source of income and is not a steady occupation. In this case, a person can consider themselves a salaried worker, whilst recognising that their means of livelihood encapsulates more than this wage labour alone. When an acquaintance, asks how things are, rather than a police officer, then the answer may be: 'Same as usual, I catch and kill'. A person's self-identification changes with respect to their interlocutors, shifting from work-related to activity-oriented description, without developing a specific 'catch and kill' identity. For skilled workers, however, the situation is simpler: work identity and activity are matched. This is also the case of a worker who is in the process of gaining skills, such as a helper. Indeed, a worker needs to be qualified, skilled or in the process of gaining skills to be able to identify with a profession. Doing carpentry, welding, or masonry is also 'to be' a carpenter, welder, or mason.

In part, this is because construction work provides the main form of income for those involved in a specific trade. However, skills are in themselves pivotal to this process of being recognized, and recognizing oneself, with a gainful activity in ways which do not hold true for unskilled work. The pride in the product of one's labour underscores this difference in identification.

⁴⁰ Always refers to the author.

This became evident to me in the remarks I heard from workers about past jobs, when they pointed out buildings to me as we moved around the city, or showed me photos of these projects. While the labourer is proud of the results of the work done ('I've built this, it was a lot of hard work'), the mason or tiler, welder, etc. is also proud of the refinement, of the quality of the product ('look at how well I laid this wall, look how nicely I tiled this room, look at the quality of this metal gate'). On a basic level, the unskilled labourer displays pride in the 'hard work' done, while for the skilled worker, his ability and expertise are evident in the final product.

Lefebvre, applying the Marxian notion of alienation to space, noted that buildings become detached from productive labour (Lefebvre 1991, 113). Once completed, the activity behind the production of a building is 'forgotten'. However, buildings are understood by construction workers with specific reference to their labour. The very things of the city, that constitute its spaces, are either recognized as produced, or they are understood through the skills or physical efforts that are involved in the production process. While at home looking at a nearby building, walking down a street or on the back of a contractor's pick-up truck, workers would comment on their own past jobs or the work of others that they would recognize around the city in terms of effort or quality. Therefore, they also recognised their role in making the city in terms of physical effort or skills. Movement not only links wage and wageless work, but also gives rise to an uplifting, albeit ephemeral, pride in one's work.



Figure 7 Small cement work

Conclusion

Situated between wage labour and wageless work, those who catch and kill are not in the position of climbing the ladder of a particular trade or establishing a business of their own. As the metaphor indicates, they are skilled urban hunters who quickly run out of game. Moving within the city according to skills not recognized on the labour market opens economic possibilities while reproducing a condition of in-betweenness. Their situation leaves little scope for personal and social recognition in terms of a professional identity, although daily movement among the fruits of their labour offers a temporary occasion of fulfilment itself framed in terms of the efforts and skills invested in construction work.

Movement as object of ethnographic analysis opens the possibility of understanding the relationship between different kinds of work and life

conditions, situating subjects simultaneously within their urban social environments and the place they occupy in the hierarchical organization of labour. In this case, flexibility through diversification of economic activities does not lead to the achievement of autonomy. Rather, this diversification corresponds to a state of uncertainty maintained through the reproduction of a condition of dependency which can be described as precarious.

In the next chapter, I follow Dylan in his neighbourhood and show how he and his partner negotiated dependencies with kin and non-kin in their vicinity, showing their negotiations of meaningful economic interactions in terms of dependencies and autonomy.

Chapter 3. A Birthday Cake

3.1 The cake

I get to Madeline's flat, carrying a strawberry cake as a present for her birthday. It is topped with her name and birthday wishes written in icing, edible flowers, and a pink spray decoration. Visibly happy, we light the candles (of the sparkler kind), and she hurries taking pictures of it, but the operation takes some time and the candles slightly burn the top of it. Laughing copiously, we all try to blow them out before it is too late.

Madeline starts to cut the cake in small, evenly-sized pieces. As soon as their eldest daughter comes back from the shop with aluminium foil, she wraps the pieces with her partner Dylan. The daughter is sent to deliver some of it, while Madeline takes care of the remainder.

The first to receive the cake are three Dylan's sisters who live in the nearby alley, who are also hosting Dylan's brother visiting from his village. A piece goes to a lady who lives upstairs, and Madeline goes back to her with another piece for her boyfriend who has claimed it. Another is sent to the next-door neighbour on the same floor. One to the lady who bakes, and to her daughter living next to her – both living on the same floor of the three-storey cement building. Another piece goes to a friend of Madeline for whom she collects money. The next piece is for a friend of Dylan's sisters living in the nearby alley – otherwise she might say 'Madeline have a bad attitude!', Dylan and Madeline explain to me, imitating her voice. Finally, we each eat a piece ourselves from the remaining cake (a portion bigger than the ones sent away). I am given a considerably big slice compared with Madeline, Dylan or their two daughters.

The next day a similar scene unfolded. I lent Madeline (Dylan's partner) a pot and she cooked lunch for her birthday, adding potato salad to the usual stew chicken and rice and beans. On the table, this lunch was doled out into plastic bowls which were then covered with aluminium foil and given to Dylan's eldest daughter to be delivered. Dylan was expecting some food from his brother. It was the birthday of Dylan's brother's son, and the two were celebrating at Dylan's sister's place. Dylan's younger daughter had already joined these cousins, uncle and aunties for this other celebration while the eldest daughter went some time later. I was sent away with another plate of food (having eaten one already in the flat) to ensure that Belize continued to be 'good for me', in other words, that I did not get skinnier. It was common to see food carried to and from Madeline's house on occasions like this. Apart from this special day, there were daily interactions where food, items and money, came to and from Madeline and Dylan's flat.

The previous chapter looked at Dylan's quest for labour through Belize City. This chapter follows his and Madeline's everyday efforts to make a living beyond his 'hunting'. This particular ethnographic scene is a starting point to trace the relationships that Madeline and Dylan maintained with people predominantly in their vicinity. Firstly, I outline their understanding of kin bonds as based on shared blood ties in contrast to non-kin. Expectations of mutual support underline the understanding of consanguinity. Consanguineal relations are understood as more problematic than those between non-consanguines. To ask something from consanguineal kin is to threaten the quality of the relationship with them because requests are difficult to refuse even if they cause tensions. I show below how the level of genealogical and physical proximity complicate a 'close' relationship between consanguines in practice, in a context where they play a pivotal economic role.

I trace the different meanings Dylan and Madeline attribute to their relationship through an ethnographic focus on everyday interactions and

personal biographies. These personal histories of feelings, constraints and expectations inform the synchronic multiple positions they occupy as they practise kinship in their daily efforts to make a living. The economic potentialities of kinship, which shape everyday affective relations in their own right, can be understood by looking at the intersection of three levels of proximity: genealogical, spatial and subjective. Subjective proximity is the degree of *amity*, the ideal qualitative condition of the relationship with one's consanguines. Dylan's most significant relationships were with his maternal siblings. I trace the ways in which he worked to keep relationships on good terms by distancing from consanguineal kin during everyday interactions. The closer spatial proximity to siblings, the easier it is to ruin the relationship through the potential frequency of interactions. I show how Madeline, as sister-in-law, built relationships over the long term with Dylan's siblings and managed the resource flows which otherwise could have jeopardized Dylan's closeness to them. Similarly, I show how nieces and nephews play a pivotal role in keeping siblings close, adding an intergenerational perspective. I then turn to Madeline's consanguines. Being the only child of her mother, she had close contact with mother's siblings. Madeline's situation reveals the highly reciprocal and supportive nature of her relationships with her female cousins and aunties, and the difficulty in managing them in conditions of physical proximity.

I expand the discussion in generational terms by analysing relationships with parents. In the case of Madeline's and Dylan's respective positions as daughter and son, the three levels of proximity follow different principles. Notably, their dependability upon their parents conditions their physical proximity. Madeline's relationship with her mother shows the importance of mutual support in times of need, especially following difficulties related to their respective male partners. Madeline and Dylan's closeness with their fathers is not a straightforward outcome of distance in physical terms, rather it is dependent upon the paternal role of the provider. Being dependent upon the male parent is a condition of closeness in subjective terms. Thus, rather

than being confined to consanguineal bonds, fatherhood can also be established through the actions of their respective stepfathers.

Madeline and Dylan were parents themselves. They had children together as well as with previous partners. In a context of economic scarcity, I show the impact of fathers' difficulties in fulfilling their paternal roles, and mothers' struggles to sustain their children depending on their father's contributions. The frictions created by negotiating closeness and distance in relations to children between different partners has strong emotional consequences. To aid the reader in the exploration of extensive kinship relations, I provide CAPITAL letters for Madeline's relatives, and numbers in figures for Dylan's relatives, both in parenthesis and preceded by a hash (#). These correspond to relatives in Dylan's and Madeline's kinship charts at the end of the chapter.

Starting from the slices of birthday cake sent to non-kin, I then follow Dylan's and Madeline's relations with others in their vicinity. I point to the significance of being neighbours and the relevance of the couple's biographies grounded in the area where they continued to live. As with relatives, these relations were important as they made economic resources available to Dylan and Madeline but were easier to handle than those with kin. However, not being based on consanguinity, they were evaluated in the moral register of 'bad mind', applied to people who negatively impact one's status and are unwilling to share, and reciprocate. This was present in everyday expressions and used to evaluate how relationships should be practiced between non-consanguines, while gender norms and genealogy supplied a framework to orient behaviour between consanguines.

3.2 Blood and water

The first to receive pieces of cake were three Dylan's sisters (#5,7,8) who lived in an adjacent alley less than a hundred meters away from him, where two of them also cohabited (#5,8). Dylan had eight living siblings from his

mother's side, from four different 'sets' (i.e. fathers) and aged between early twenties and early forties. These were the three who lived closest to him. Dylan and Madeline had frequent interactions with them. In Dylan's words his sisters 'don't show her [Madeline] bad face right?', and 'they love her more than Tina [his former partner], they don't like Tina for notn [don't like her at all]'. Dylan was quite sure that they would have also sent some food, since they were celebrating Dylan's youngest male sibling (#2) son's birthday. Madeline and Dylan's daughters often visited their aunties to play with their cousins especially during weekends. Their cousins who were closer in age also went at times to play in Madeline and Dylan's flat.

On one such occasion, while I was chatting with Dylan in their kitchen, their daughters came from the adjacent room accusing each other of starting a fight with one of their cousins. 'Yu kyaahn fait wit unu cousin, yu noa!? How shee gwain back hoam an tel aanti dat Aisha [youngest daughter] waahn fait wit shee!? Dis da unu kozn! Blood tika dan waata! Dis da unu sayhn blod!'⁴¹ their father lectured them. Dylan was referring to the importance of having a good relationship with consanguines, resorting to the beginning of a proverb popular in Belize: 'Blood is thicker than water', and stressing the importance of consanguinity: 'This is your same blood'. Resorting to a form of folk knowledge when scolding his children Dylan taught his children a lesson about kinship that was far from trivial. This reading of relationships based on consanguinity is not surprisingly given the literature on the topic in the anthropology of the Caribbean. Dylan used blood, which stands here to assert a relationship based on a shared common substance (Alexander 1976), inherited bilaterally (R. T. Smith 1988; Chamberlain 2003; for exceptions see M. G. Smith 1962, 247; Clarke 2002). (Unrestricted cognatic or nonunilineal descent is a common feature of Caribbean kinship systems.) Alexander (1976) has argued that the mutuality implied by this articulation of consanguinity, an 'enduring diffuse solidarity' (Schneider 1968, 50 in

⁴¹ 'You can't fight with your cousin, you know!? How she's going back home and tell aunty that Aisha wants to fight with her!? This is your cousin! Blood is thicker than water! This is your same blood!'

Alexander 1976, 35), is 'formulated [...] as a fact outside the realm of human choice', since consanguinity is understood as based on an 'objective fact of biological connection' (Alexander 1976, 33).

Expected behaviour towards consanguines is rendered through the metaphor of blood. This understanding of mutuality based on consanguinity is central to the discussion here, but I take this use of the blood image to be contextual (i.e. used ad hoc) (R. T. Smith 1988, 39), and focus instead on the consequences of consanguinity in the everyday. Hence, without denying the symbolic, bodily and substantial aspects of blood (Carsten 2011), I do not explore them in detail here. I found 'blood' to have limited importance for my interlocutors when negotiating family dependencies. My interlocutors only occasionally mentioned blood in relation to kin, and mainly in a figurative sense in order to reinforce some points in specific circumstances. Therefore, rather than focusing on the significance of 'blood' relations in substantive terms here, I will analytically explore 'closeness' and 'distance' as they are negotiated between relatives. I look at consanguinity as underpinning solidarity and thus informing how relations are practised. I locate this practice within the movement between closeness and distance, which is informed by an understanding of consanguinity as a natural fact that nonetheless allows for actor's subjective evaluations. The metaphor of blood and water is important insofar as it serves to illustrate one aspect of consanguineal ties: how they are understood as distinct from other kinds of relationships.

Having specified that the discussion takes blood and water as metaphoric images, rather than symbols implying wider cosmological understandings, it is now necessary to further look at this proverbial image of blood and water as it is not peculiar to Belize (e.g. Chernoff 2003, 238)⁴². For instance, within the Caribbean context, it includes the views that Mary Chamberlain (2003, 2006) collected from transnational Jamaican families, some of whose

⁴² It has also been used as emblematic of assumptions in anthropological analyses of kinship (Schneider 1984, ch. 14).

members emigrated to the UK. For one of them, Benson, 'blood is thicker than water, so families always come first ... we share and share', (Chamberlain 2006, 178); for Gregor, family 'can also be the most troublesome, but the family is, I don't know how to put it better than blood over water.' (Chamberlain 2003, 71). Chamberlain understands her informants' accounts as stressing the importance of lineage, as beliefs originating from upbringing and transnational life experience increased, rather than reduced, the centrifugality of Caribbean kinship. While these aspects are congruous with the case presented here, I wish to stress Chamberlain's own interlocutor's note on family as the 'most troublesome'. The possible conflictual nature of consanguinity is implied in the second part of the saying in its Belizean version, that Dylan omitted in the context of teaching his children a lesson: '...but water tastes better.' The overall meaning is that even if bonds between consanguines are strong, other kinds of relationship are less complicated (or 'troublesome') to handle.

Following Dylan's words and their omitted part, I argue that this tension can be understood and navigated in relation to one's 'closeness' to and 'distance' from consanguines. While distance in genealogical terms is understood as 'natural' (blood), and behaviour is expected according to one's role in relation to kin (according to genealogy, gender and age), the practice of kinship aims at creating closeness and distance within given genealogical and spatial proximity. As I show below, it is the understanding of kinship's problematic, rather than cohesive, nature - blood being thicker than water but less tasty - that elucidates the practices of managing proximity and dependencies between kin.

3.3 Dylan

A caveat is necessary before turning to the analysis of relationships between relatives. It would be tempting to analyse asking and giving between relatives from the perspective of gift theory. However, it would be inadequate. This claim does not mean to question the validity of such

theories in general, but rather concerns their applicability for the case discussed here for two reasons: (1) family members do not stress relationships of giving-accepting, but rather asking-receiving, (2) the focus is not on establishing and recognising relationships, is on their quality: what they ought to be. While in Maussian terms refusing *to accept* a gift indicates the refusal of transaction, thus of association (cf. Carrier 1991, 124), here it is the refusal *to ask* which is a refusal to threaten the quality of a bond that implies giving. The problem is not giving and accepting, but asking, which can put a relative in the difficult position of having to give *because* being asked (or at least uncomfortably come up with an excuse not to give). Second, even if familial relations of asking-and-giving appear as only a slight variation on the giving-and-receiving of gifts, the generative aspect of the gift in terms of social relationships is still absent simply because familial relationships are seen as already established. Looking at gifts either from a Maussian perspective (Mauss 2011), or from the perspective of free gifts, means inscribing giving-taking (or asking-receiving) within a logic of establishing relationships. Successful 'free gifts' are such because they do not establish relationships, and unsuccessful even when they establish only potential reciprocity (Pipyrrou 2014). They are defined negatively by relationality. Here, relationships are neither established nor broken through gift exchange; rather, kin relationships exist prior to any giving-and-taking, or asking-and-receiving. Looking at gifts is misleading in this sense as it stresses a relationally generative aspect.

Mutuality is not established by giving-and-taking. Mutuality in principle *informs* these relationships. However, paradoxically, practising mutuality threatens them. Here, by mutuality I mean the reciprocal expectation of solidarity between consanguines based on their own understandings of consanguinity. I do not focus here on what kinship is, what constitutes kinship, or what defines it in terms of mutuality (cf. Robbins 2013; Sahlins 2013; Pina-Cabral 2013). Rather, I focus on how people relate to their kin in practice according to the problematic principle of mutual solidarity described above. Thus, the problem with asking for help is not that it opens

up the possibility of being asked for something in the future, which presents the problem of not being able to reciprocate for the one who asked in the first place (cf. Neumark 2017, 762). Asking is problematic because invites the other to give. A relative that asks too much is considered as taking advantage of the mutuality implied in consanguinity.

Indeed, to analyse how consanguineal relationships inform practice, it is necessary to focus not so much on how they have come to be (in terms of common descent), but how they ought to be. The relationship between consanguines is not in itself jeopardized by asking, but rather the proximity between the two comes into question: their *amity*. Fortes used the word to term the 'axiom of prescriptive altruism' that morally underlines kinship relations (Fortes 1969: 251, in Pitt-Rivers 1973). Pitt-Rivers has subsequently taken amity to rethink the analytical distinction between kin and friendship ties. For Pitt-Rivers, amity exists for the same person in different relations between 'the kith and the kin' (Pitt-Rivers 1973). Rather than being a distinction between kin and other kinds of relations, amity is an element of both but is either underlined by jural pressures (kinship as system) or free from them (network of dyadic bonds). Recalling the derivation of amity from the Latin *amicus* (friend), I propose to use it to describe the relationship between consanguines to which my interlocutors aspired: amity as the desirable outcome of practice. Instead of focusing on amity as a premise (or underlying principle) of certain kinds of relationships, I focus on the practices that aim at its establishment or endurance as a quality between relatives (amity as outcome of practice). Amity, can be troubled *because* of the mutuality underlying consanguineous relationships, as in the instance of siblings. In the everyday, relationships between siblings reveal the frictions between how these relations are in practice, and how siblings imagine that they ought to be.

Dylan always felt that his younger sisters (#5,6,7,8) had been spoilt by his mother. At the time of my fieldwork, they appeared to have 'better lives' (in terms of being more educated or/and having better jobs), because of their

being younger and female. Dylan's upbringing and experience as a brother informed his behaviour as a father. After Dylan had his two daughters with Madeline, he went to cohabit with another woman, from who he had a son. Then, he left his son and his mother and went back to live with Madeline and their daughters (and the son Madeline had with another man with whom she cohabited for some time while Dylan was away). Dylan explained that when his two-year-old son is grown up, his son will understand that Dylan moved back with Dylan's daughters (Dylan's son sisters) because they needed a paternal figure. Being females, Dylan felt that they needed 'their dad around' more than his son, and in the future 'eventually their brother will take care of them, nobody will chance them, right?', his son being the male sibling who 'protect[s] and provide[s]' (Barrow 1998, 346; cf. González 1965 on the role of consanguineal male relatives more broadly). Dylan made sense of his own decisions as the father of both male and female children by framing it in terms of an established gendered pattern, understanding his past as a young brother in relation to his sisters with the future of his own son as a brother to Dylan's daughters. Notably, Dylan never talked of other siblings as being 'half-siblings' or 'half-blood', and I did not find this usage common in Belize City (cf. R. T. Smith 1988, 58, 79; and Kerns 1983, 105 for similar remarks). Moreover, he used the blood lexicon ('full blood family') only to specify which siblings he talked about, thus in situational terms as in the use of 'blood' when scolding his daughters. Hence, I simply call siblings 'brothers' and 'sisters' through the text (the reader can consult the kinship diagrams for further information).

Even if Dylan thought of his own younger sisters as 'spoiled children', he sought their company and made sure that his children and their own spent time together. This was facilitated by an immediate physical proximity: they lived a few meters from each other, they were neighbours.

Madeline also had a friendly relationship with Dylan's neighbouring sisters, her 'sisters-in-law'⁴³, that she cultivated through regular visits. She knew them because of her on-and-off relationship with Dylan stretching back ten years, because they have been neighbours, they were close in age and had gone to the same elementary school. It was also through her that the couple was able to gain 'help' from the others. For instance, it was Madeline who was given money by Dylan's sisters, and it was her who borrowed my bike in order to collect money from another of Dylan's younger sisters (#6), who was living in their mother's village of birth but working as a secretary in the city.

The centrality of women in Caribbean kinship has mainly been discussed through the concept of 'matrifocality'. R. T. Smith (1998) coined the term in order to describe internal relations centred around the role of women as mothers. Since then, research on 'matrifocal' families (Safa 2005) and households (González 1965, 1544) have provided significant empirical data, within different analytical frameworks, that has enriched the scholarship on the Caribbean family. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to review the debates around matrifocality, which has 'preoccupied virtually every investigation in the Caribbean' (Barrow 1996, 22 see also 22-23, 72-76, 170 for a review). While born out of structural-functionalist concerns, including research focused on Belize itself (Sanford 1971), the concept has stretched its influence beyond the 1970s. Critiques have rejected the usefulness of the concept in understanding families, households and women's role within them (Olwig 1981, 73), and questioned the implied 'marginality' of men to such family structures (in the literature, men are often consigned to their peer-groups in bars, rum shops and street corners [Brana-Shute 1989, 1976; P. J. Wilson 1971]). In particular, Blackwood argues that the patriarchal and heteronormative bias in anthropological analyses of matrifocal societies has led to a failure 'to take into account men's multiple positionalities' (2005, 14). Through an ethnographic account of Dylan and Madeline's relationships,

⁴³ The use of 'in law' as modifier does not necessarily signal a legally sanctioned union (cf. R. T. Smith 1988, 39-44, 141).

I look at men's *and* women's various positionalities as they unfold in everyday social life and inform, among others, material resource flows beyond the mother-child unit. Specifically, I wish to stress here that these relationships between (sisters) 'in-law'⁴⁴ allow for resource flows that would otherwise put distance between consanguines. Dylan indicated to me his reluctance in asking his sisters for money, explaining that to constantly rely on your 'family' was the best way to deteriorate a relationship.

Indeed, Dylan conceived his relationship with his sisters as potentially problematic, within the framework of gendered consanguinity which was also being imparted to his daughters. He made sense of his relationship with his sisters in terms of childrearing practices connoted by gender dynamics referring both to his past and his children's future. Physical proximity made contact and requests easier, but also increased the chance of problems arising from the mutuality understood as underlying consanguinity. While Dylan voiced these complications, Madeline was managing the support from some of his siblings in practice. These relationships had an important economic side which 'troubled' them. However, Dylan was also affectionate to his sisters, and while Madeline had a decisive role in mediating between her partner and her sisters-in-law, these women have also enjoyed each other's company for years. Thus, the flip side of Dylan's potentially troubled relationships with his siblings, was Madeline's constant and enduring 'kin work' (di Leonardo 1987).

Dylan's older brother (#1) lived in Belize City some six-hundred meters from Dylan. Dylan visited him at times in his house or at the close-by shank-shop where he would sip a beer or play dominoes. He would sometimes give fish to Dylan, as he was employed in the fishing industry. Dylan talked of this brother as defending him when he was younger, and since he was respected in the area Dylan felt still protected by virtue of being his sibling. However, there had been conflicts in the past because his brother did not attend their

⁴⁴ Kerns, in her work on Belize, recognizes the 'personal choice' determining relationships between affines, which endure once they are established (1983, 115).

mother's funeral. This had been put behind them, but Dylan still did not 'mess with him', explaining that the 'more distant you are from your family better it is. They would get tired of your face. If I don't see him for a long time I will be happy to visit him and he will welcome me 'cause is a long time we don't see.' This account is consistent with Barrow's observation of (Barbadian) brothers describing their relationships as less affective than with different-sex siblings, even as older brothers 'look out for' the younger (Barrow 1998, 348). However, I wish to emphasize how this relationship is understood in terms of 'distance': even if his eldest brother was physically close to him, Dylan kept his interactions with his brother to a minimum in order to keep their relationship on good terms, or amicable.

Dylan's eldest sister (#3), the 'first girl', was also living in their mother's village of birth, but with their father's mother. Dylan had sporadic contact with her. This may have been due to previous conflicts: she had given a flat to Dylan, but because his former partner had 'taken advantage' and misused the property to benefit her 'family' (using the flat to wash excessive amounts of laundry), she asked Dylan to move out. As for the relationship between Dylan and his eldest brother (#1), past problems had arisen within their own family ('disrespecting' their mother) as well as with the families of their partners (Dylan's ex-partner's relatives 'taking advantage'). Dylan's relationship with his eldest sister (#3) was limited to the few occasions when Dylan visited the village and they partied together with his younger brother (#2) who also lived there. Dylan made it clear that he had a good time on such occasions specifically because they were sporadic. A certain degree of physical distance was cemented through having fewer interactions with these siblings. The same rationale was applied to his eldest brother: maintaining them close (in good relations) through distance.

Dylan's younger sister (#4) from the same 'set' was living in the USA, and Dylan had had scant communication with her. Dylan's sister sporadically

wired money to Dylan. She sometimes sent barrels⁴⁵ to her son (#9), who she left in Belize with her and Dylan's mother. She also included some toys and clothes in these shipments which her son would pass on to Dylan to give to his own daughters. Remittances have been stressed in the literature on Belize as strengthening relations with relatives abroad, for their importance in the survival of those kin who are left behind raising children in Belize, as well as the perceived negative impact that consumer items from abroad have on children left in the country (Matthei and Smith 2004, 280–81, 1998, 282–84). However, they can cause ambivalent feelings between relatives. Dylan was suspicious of his nephew, since he believed that he did not hand over all the goods that his sister had sent for him. Dylan refused to enter in a business partnership with his nephew as a taxi driver because he saw the conditions as easily leading him to incur debts. He remarked bitterly, without finishing his own sentence: 'see my own family...' At the same time, when I helped Dylan to open a Facebook account, one of the first people for whom he searched and added to his 'friends' was his sister in the USA. Since then he had more frequent and direct communication with her and was able to introduce his children to their 'aunty'.

While Dylan's sister was physically distant, they kept relating to each other through her son. This was mainly by means of clothing and gifts for the children. However, as soon as Dylan had an easy way to communicate with her via the internet, he wanted to see his sister and let his daughters virtually meet her. Thus, closeness and distance were expressed materially, giving (and receiving) goods. Nonetheless, it was also expressed emotionally through joyful shared moments, even if only through a screen. Barrow (1998) noted that a focus on men as husbands and fathers in Caribbean anthropology has ignored their equally important place in kinship systems as brothers and uncles. By recognising siblings as uncles and aunts, the important role of nephews and nieces also emerges: they were vectors through which goods travelled, within and between countries (cake, clothes,

⁴⁵ Barrels either made of plastic or cardboard are commonly used containers for shipping private goods (cf. Adominic 2017; Seller 2005).

money), they were close to their uncles and aunts and would play together as cousins, and exchange information, thus binding the family together. While relationships between siblings are rather egalitarian, cousins are seen as less 'close' than siblings, and there is a hierarchical relationship between uncles/aunts and nephews/nieces. Once, while I was sitting with Dylan on the street corner, two of his teen nephews (sons of neighbouring sisters [#5, 7]) approached us on rollerblades: 'Uncle broke right now', Dylan cut short before they could open their mouth. Neither Dylan nor his nephews were concerned that their intention to ask and his pre-emptive refusal would threaten their relationship, and he simply asked them to send his daughters home from their house, before they quickly turned back. That said, the tensions around closeness and distance between siblings is also negotiated by their roles as uncles and aunts. If asking can involve distancing, giving can also be a means of becoming closer, especially within situations where there is an understating of different economic means. This coming closer is established through the intergenerational connections made by nieces and nephews.

Olwig (2002) has shown how children in the West Indies are free to move across social domains. This is so because children are dependent upon adults and are not entirely socialized: they are not judged on the same terms as adults, who for instance can be seen as unable to provide when asking other adults for help, or whose movements might be suspected as hiding illicit activities. In the context of migration, children left at home contribute towards the expansion of networks since parents send remittances and maintain contact with those family members who remain at home rearing the children. Often, grandparents play a central role in child-rearing along with other family members, and the children are moved between the homes of different relatives (Olwig 2012). Children facilitate communication and relationality between adults both in terms of migration, and through movement within the urban environment. In particular, being in a dependent position as Olwig suggests, they are not subject to the possible distancing

between consanguineals which results from frequency of interaction: they keep their parents, uncles and aunties 'close'.

Dylan knew from his father's accounts that he had two brothers and a sister in the USA on his paternal side, but 'I don't know about them', he remarked, 'I only know about me and my two sisters here in Belize (#3,4) [...] those are my full blood family, right!?' Dylan repeated to me that he had missed the opportunity to get to know his siblings. This was a result of his father's distance as a father figure, rather than any physical distance (see § 3.4, also ch. 2).



Figure 8 Children easily move between houses and yards

Dylan had sporadic interactions with more genealogically distant relatives. Around festive periods of the year (such as Christmas or Easter), Dylan received money from his mother's sisters and brothers living in Belize City. At other times, their contribution would be circumstantial, when for instance meeting an auntie running a nearby shop (#13) or her sons, or an uncle that worked as a contractor (#12), who nevertheless did not employ Dylan since he had 'personal workers'. When Dylan met his relatives in the city by

chance, there was a possibility that they gave him 'a ten or twenty' dollars. These encounters mainly occurred within public spaces while Dylan was vigilantly moving around the city looking for work, as outlined in chapter 2. The sense of obligation to give money because to consanguineal relatives helped Dylan to choose itineraries around the city that facilitated these circumstantial encounters, and also led him to ignore other areas and streets where relatives could ask him, in turn, for help. Mutuality came into play somewhat unpredictably, for example when someone asked a family member for money on street corners. Once, while walking down a busy street in the downtown area, Dylan suddenly stopped, turned to a shop window and pretended to look at it. When I asked him why he did this, he told me to look at a group of four people crossing the street: 'There is my family from the village over there, I don't want them to see me because they will ask me for money!'⁴⁶

Relationships established in a past of physical proximity were also possibly enduring and outlined in economic terms of not 'forgetting'⁴⁷ about each other, and expressed through kinship terminology (cf. Stack 1974). Dylan had a special affection for his 'little Latino family'. A friend from his posse of his early twenties migrated to Europe years earlier. His Honduran-born mother moved from the street where Dylan had lived to an area in the southwestern outskirts of the city. She did not 'forget' Dylan (and Madeline), and would give Dylan money from time to time, or call him to do some work in her wooden stilt house above a mosquito-infested swamp in the Southside, on the opposite side of the river from where wealthier Belizeans lived in their cement houses on dry land. Being concerned about someone therefore involved a morally positive disposition, that underlined personal relationships beyond those between consanguines (cf. Lawrence 1984, 38, 131). While there was no confusion over the fact that these people were not "blood" relatives, Dylan expressed their mutual attachment in terms of 'little

⁴⁶ These were an aunty and cousins, not siblings.

⁴⁷ See Kerns (1983, 111) for the use of this language of economic 'remembrance' in Belize.

family' ('little' referring to degree rather than size), that still was capable of caring about him and his partner, whom his friend's mother had seen growing up together with her son. Rather than denying the economic aspect of this relationship, Dylan stressed it as the manifestation a bond conveyed through the language of 'family'.

Thus, the physically closer his siblings were, the more distancing Dylan had to keep their relation in order to keep it amicable. The aspects of their relationships that could have endangered their amity were managed on the one hand by Madeline, by virtue of her being an affine and especially through her long-term friendship with Dylan's sisters, and by Dylan's children, nieces and nephews, by virtue of being younger and of a different generation.

3.4 Madeline

Madeline was her mother's only child. She knew about five sisters and a brother from her father's side, but she could only remember (with considerable effort) the name of her brother who was living in a southern district. She also did not know her other paternal relatives (cf. Kerns 1983, 112).

Of Madeline's consanguines from her mother's side, the only ones living in Belize City were an 'uncle' (mother's brother) (#D) and an 'aunty' (mother's sister) (#I). Madeline saw her uncle at times, and he gave her small amounts of money or groceries. She had everyday interactions with her aunt, who was two years older than her, and lived on the same street. Madeline visited her in the yard which her aunty shared with other neighbours, and she went to Madeleine's flat from time to time. Their children also played together in each other's houses. Between the two households there was a constant flux of all sorts of things. Goods and utensils would get delivered by their children: a phone charger, a bit of sugar, a frying pan, a pot, a plate of food (the last mainly from Madeline to her aunt). Occasionally they would borrow small sums of money from each other. Madeline had ambivalent feelings

towards her aunt: while never refusing to lend a utensil, or send food, she often emphasized the excessive number of requests that her aunt made. Expectations of a certain degree of reciprocity underpinned these requests. This was clearly expressed once when Dylan was pushing Madeline not to share food with her aunt. Madeline promptly replied that the payday of her aunt's husband was only a few days away, so they could expect food or money back from them if they needed. On one hand, Madeline felt compelled not to refuse requests made by her 'aunt'. On the other, she understood that she was also entitled to ask for favours herself, because of the mutuality implied by consanguinity.

In contrast, Dylan often compared their situation of having an unstable income, with the stability given by the wage job of Madeline's aunt's partner – and father of her children. He stressed to me that he and Madeline helped the couple when they had been in financial need. Later, they 'forgot' to reciprocate. This was remarked by Dylan in a joking manner, for instance suggesting sending chicken legs with the rice instead of a more valuable part of the meat, or buying her a broom for Christmas so the 'witch' could fly away. It also took more serious overtones when he described her as 'bad minded', such as when she did not invite them to a party at her partner's relatives house. On another occasion, she borrowed a pair of shoes for her younger daughter – a gift to Dylan's younger daughter by one of his sisters – and returned them in a bad condition. According to Dylan, the problem was that when Madeline asked her aunt for a small amount of money as compensation, she refused to pay. Dylan did not mediate in the relationship between his partner and her aunt, and he did not socialize with most of her family. The expression he used, 'bad mind', was interchangeable with having a 'bad attitude' or 'showing a bad face'. From Dylan's perspective, unlike her aunt, his sisters did not show a 'bad face' to Madeline. While generally applied in connection to behaviours that negatively impact one's condition and status, such as talking contemptuously behind one's back, here 'bad mind' was used in order to stress someone's unwillingness to share, and by extension reciprocate, even as they sought to take from their relatives

beyond acceptable limits. This moral register will be expanded upon later; here it is enough to note how it is used to judge non-consanguines (in this case 'in-laws') according to their behaviour.

When the start of the school year drew close, I gave some money to Dylan because I knew that it was a financially challenging period: there were school fees to be paid, uniforms, textbooks and stationery to be bought (cf. Perriott 2004, 9–10; GOB and CDB, 2011, 94, 168). I later discovered that this led to conflict with Madeline's aunt when the couple refused to give her a share of the money to which she felt entitled: 'She's crazy', Madeline cut short. In Dylan's words, Madeline's aunt was coming less and less to their home because she was 'jealous' of the ways I was 'helping' them. While I regretted having provoked conflict with an act that I initially deemed unharmed, this episode stressed to me the moral connotations of kinship bonds. Sharing was expected, and judged, in terms of economic affluence, as in the case of Dylan's sisters in Belize who knew of his financial situation, and his sister in the US who was more affluent than him. One's knowledge of another's financial situation serves in mediating requests in practice, as seen in Madeline's comments above about her aunt's partner's upcoming payday. This is in apparent contradiction with the mutuality implied in consanguinity stressed earlier. However, it represents another element (alongside genealogical position, age, and gender) that complicates the principle of mutuality without contradicting it. Morally, relatives that are better off should give more than they ask. But if they were not entitled to ask, refusal would not be problematic. Madeline did not contest her auntie's requests as such; she questioned their frequency. It was Dylan, who understood their relation but was not a consanguine, who was prepared to refuse her requests and labelled her as 'bad minded'. These tensions were heightened in everyday interactions because of their proximity in genealogical and spatial terms, even as refusing became more problematic in this context.

Madeline's sense of obligation towards her aunt can be inscribed within a history of closeness to her maternal consanguines (especially females).

When Madeleine's mother's sisters or nieces needed to stay in the city, they were hosted by either Madeline's mother's sister (#I) or Madeline herself. In order to participate in a funeral, or solve bureaucratic or health issues in Belize City, they were hosted in one of the rooms in the flat. They slept on mattresses on the ground since the couple did not have beds, either in a separate room - otherwise used to hang the laundry - or with Madeline and her children if Dylan was sent to sleep alone. In particular, one of Madeline's cousins was often in the house (#P). 'She come an' go' to and from the city since Madeline was younger, and she continued through the years. Probably for this reason, Dylan also enjoyed her company. At the beginning of my fieldwork, this cousin was working in the city, and one of the first times I sat on the street to chat with Dylan, he was waiting outside for her few dollars' contribution to buy candles that were necessary to lighten the flat - at that time disconnected from the electric system.

Madeline also talked with great affection of her grandfather and late grandmother, whom she stressed were parents of all her mother's siblings, who bore the same surname. Madeline's grandfather used to work for the public health sector in Belize City. Madeline lived with him, her grandmother and her mother during her childhood, just a few blocks away from her current flat. After her grandfather moved back to his birth village, Madeline spent time with him during his occasional visits in Belize City when he brought fish, plantain, 'banana fi [to] cook' and 'a lee [little] ten' dollars.

Madeline also went sometimes to her grandparent's village for pleasure. In fact, two of Madeline's mother's brothers (#E, G) and three of her mother's sisters (#A, B, F) were living there, as well as her father (#L) and stepfather (#O). It also provided an escape when her, her mother or her neighbouring aunt had conflicts with their partners.

Madeline's maternal relatives were extremely important. The flexible household structure that she maintained was consistent with the emotional and economic support that she, her mother, her aunties and cousins gave

to each other (cf. Gonzalez 1984, 7–8). This was true in Belize City, as well as between Belize City and the village. These women would take care of each other when they needed somewhere to stay because they had fallen out with a partner, or because they were visiting the city, or just for fun. However, this kind of reciprocal support did not characterize all their relationships. For instance, Madeline recounted how she paid another aunty (#H) living on a caye near Belize City to babysit her daughters when Madeline was without a partner and working as a cook in a restaurant and later as a waitress in a bar. However, the kind of reciprocal behaviour outlined above was a salient aspect of how these sisters, aunties and nieces engaged with each other.

This is perhaps unsurprising since these women were Garifuna. Virginia Kerns' work among Garifuna in southern Belize (1983), although based on fieldwork in the mid-1970s, constitutes an important point of reference as much of what she describes is recognizable here. 'Links with and between women as mothers provide the stable framework of social life' (Kerns 1983, 1), she notes, echoing matrifocal perspectives. Moreover, the responsibilities of mothers towards daughters reversed through the life cycle, the relations between mothers and grown children were affectionate and informal (Ibid. 110), and the daughters re-joined the mothers' house during ordinary and transitory 'separations [from their partners], lasting from a matter of days to a month or longer' (Ibid. 108-9). Kerns also reported a clear division between close blood relatives and other kin, the former including 'All lineals and classificatory lineals – lineal's siblings and ego's first cousins' (1983, 106). Within this circle, relations of trust as well as obligations of mutual support (understood as 'duty' [Kerns 1983, 8]) were established⁴⁸, and household composition and distribution within the same extended families

⁴⁸ While Kern stresses specific financial obligations to lineal kin (especially in ritual terms) (1983, 107), she also notes that 'extended families also act as vehicles of mutual support' (1983, 128).

varied as kin networks became dispersed in different areas of Belize and outside the country (Ibid. 116).

While these understandings of kinship bonds kept these women close even if they were dispersed around the country, mutuality's financial implications also led to problematic situations when proximity was physical and involved everyday interactions. On one hand, it was difficult to dismiss requests when asked; on the other, these requests could exceed what was considered proper in a balanced relation. Affluence was used to judge and evaluate the fairness of these relations, but could not provide a reasonable motivation to refuse to engage in them alone. Therefore, physical and genealogical proximity both cemented these relations and contributed to their inherent tensions.

So far, I have portrayed relationships as they were understood from Madeline and Dylan's point of view. Barrow praised R.T. Smith and Alexander's methodology as 'privileging the images and meanings given to family life by social actors as they construct their worldview and understand themselves' (Barrow 1998, 344). I retain the understandings actors have of the nature of kinship bonds, and of their gendered roles within kinship systems. However, my aim is also to place these understandings within kinship's 'area of action', to use Alexander's formulations of the realm left out of his own analysis (1976, 36). It is within this area that the practice of kinship consists involves practices of becoming closer or distancing. Closeness and distance can be distinguished on three levels. (1) Genealogical proximity is understood as one's place in the family tree. Age and gender contribute to the expectations that one relative has of another on this level. (2) Spatial proximity affects the potential to act upon or expect mutuality in proportion to expectations established in genealogical terms. (3) Specific practices of becoming close or distancing (within given genealogical and spatial conditions) determine the subjective level of proximity, also evaluated in terms of differential affluence. These elements are not new to anthropological analyses of kinship. Firth noted that 'kinship

linkage is rendered effective in economic terms largely because' of residential proximity (Firth 2011, 68), and pointed to the fact that correlation between 'propinquity of relationship' (Firth 2011, 262–63) (what is here genealogical 'closeness') and spatial proximity cannot be assumed. I shall focus upon the subjective level of proximity that aims at 'amity' and can (also) be obtained through distancing genealogically propinquous and spatially proximal kin here.

From an everyday and subjective point of view, practices of kinship aiming at amity bring relatives closer or put distance between them (and distances to maintain nearby) within given spatial conditions (physical proximity) and common understandings of gendered roles and genealogy. While the flow of goods and money does not exhaust how kinship operates in practice (nor is this flow understood as constitutive of kinship per se), it is a fundamental aspect of a practice of kinship as part of everyday experience and rest upon understandings of differential affluence. In the next section, I turn to Dylan and Madeline's relations with their parents to further illustrate the correlation between these three levels of proximity.

Madeline enjoyed continual mutual support from her mother's siblings and her cousins, especially female. Dylan did not mediate between them. While Madeline could count on these relatives for support, both in the city and in her mother's birth village, she also found it problematic to refuse requests that had been made possible by physical proximity. These requests were particularly unwelcome because they were partially judged on the basis of differential affluence.

3.5 Parents

Madeline interacted with her mother on a nearly daily basis. The two had a strong emotional bond and often socialized with Madeline's mothers' sister (#I) in the latter's nearby yard, sometimes in Madeline's flat, and at times

on the street corner in the evenings. Madeline had also cohabited with her mother for most of the time when she had been without a male partner.

Similarly, following her separations from her partner during my fieldwork, Madeline's mother would move in with Madeline and Dylan for a few days or a few weeks at a time, until the situation was resolved. This reflects the mutually supportive nature of the relationships outlined in the previous section, as well as the resulting fluid household composition. Dylan complained that it was 'like having another daughter to feed', but I never heard that this led to conflict between him and Madeline's mother. There were economic relations on the level of commodity exchange beyond sociability and hospitality. For instance, the television in the couple's flat – which received a feeble signal from a couple of Belizean TV channels after they managed to get an electrical connection from a wire coming through the window of another neighbour– was purchased from Madeline's mother, and paid in instalments. At the beginning of my fieldwork, the couple also purchased buckets of water from her, since their flat was not connected to the water system. After a fight between mother and daughter, Madeline and Dylan started to buy it from neighbours in a nearby alley, and subsequently from neighbours in their building who had access to water. As with the other maternal relatives of Madeline, her relationship with her mother was not exclusively reciprocal in nature. Nonetheless, it was important that they could go to each other's houses and expect to be looked after in times of need.

Madeline's birth father gave her 'a little' monetary contribution when she came to Belize City. It was her stepfather (#0), however, to whom she referred as her 'dad', who was sending money monthly. He had no biological offspring and had not been in a relationship with her mother since Madeline was fourteen. 'He minded me Joseph, he buy pampers, he buy milk', she told me, referring to her childhood. And he still 'minded' her, she told me, stressing the importance of his contribution of fifty dollars a month to the

couple's finances. Indeed, she used to tell me that she was bringing in more money than Dylan precisely because of her father.

Madeline's relationship with her mother was certainly strengthened by virtue of being her only child, through their proximity throughout Madeline's life, and through their mutual support in times of need. Madeline's stepfather, while not 'blood' related and physically distant, was for Madeline her 'dad'. For Madeline, the nature of the relationship was based on his past and present behaviour consistent with the role of father as a provider, analogous to the character of the male parent as a resource-giving figure (Chevannes 2000, 139) also observed in Belize City (Winters 2006, 58–61). Moreover, while not 'blood' related, Madeline's step-father was one of the 'people who are more 'really' relatives than real relatives (because of their actions)' (R. T. Smith 1988, 37).

Dylan's mother died when he was in his early twenties. His father (#11) moved to the USA when Dylan was two weeks old and had returned to live in Belize City approximately a year and a half ago. Dylan talked about him in a bitter, reprehensive tone.

When my mom died he didn't come to funeral, he didn't send a postcard. All of this years I didn't know him, my sisters went to States [...] I didn't went to States not a year. He didn't send me a clothes, a tennis [i.e. pair of sneakers], a shirt, nothing. He didn't say 'Hi Dylan, how you doing?'. He didn't help me with school. He didn't help me nothing, in my whole life.

Dylan had wanted to avoid contact with his father, but after meeting him for the first time, he decided to try to (re)connect. Dylan took his daughters to meet him in the hope that, as the grandfather of his children, he could make amends for the father he had not been to him. However, Dylan's decision 'not to hold malice with him' and 'to let he be my father', was not without its tensions. Dylan's father had given him a pair of sneakers after their

reconciliation, but Dylan lamented that such a gift was useless: the shoes were the wrong size.

This bitter detail recalls the ways Dylan assessed his father's behaviour. While lamenting his distance – not communicating with or paying respect to his mother – the emphasis was on the opportunities Dylan was not given, being left out from the benefits related to his father's residency in the USA, and from his paternal grandmother's attention. On the one hand, out of his two elder sisters from the same parents, one had a job as a legal advisor in Belize (#3), and the other was living in the USA (#4) (and therefore assumed to be on track for a better life). In Dylan's rationale, they had had more opportunities than him, and both were better off than him as a result. Moreover, Dylan's concern was with the absence of his father as a contributor, (a role which Dylan hoped that he could at least partially redeem when it came to his own daughters). This absence was symbolised by the shoes episode, as he clearly didn't know his own son. While I was on fieldwork, apart from gifts to his granddaughters, and the visits Dylan paid to him, Dylan's father would occasionally give money or groceries to his son.

Nonetheless, similarly to Madeline, Dylan 'had a real dad' (his words), whom Dylan described as 'the father that I really loved', 'the dad I knew' who 'give me the dad that I didn't have'. He (#10) was the late biological father of his two younger sisters (#7,8) and raised Dylan and the two sisters between them (#5,6). He used to take Dylan to work with him in construction and other heavy tasks, teaching Dylan the 'hard work': 'that a man could not sleep with the sun shining on his head'. He also visited him, bringing along food and money when Dylan was at the childcare centre (where he spent ten years) and treated him and his sisters equally. I was reminded of Dylan's impressions about his 'real dad' when Dylan cradled, laughed and looked after Madeline's infant son, and suggested to me that he had to be a father to him, since the baby was not to blame for his (biological) father's absence. While he would say that 'is not my son but he's still like my son', or 'I love him like my son', he also contextualised his situation in the terms of popular

understandings of being a good kinsman: 'If you love the cow you got to love the calf.⁴⁹ You don't play around, right? [...] So, I can't vex about it, I just gotta do my t[h]ing.'

Dylan understood his late stepfather as the 'real' father in his life. He saw him both as a provider and as an example, someone that taught him how to be a man; qualities that his biological father lacked. Their father was 'close' to Dylan's sisters, while 'distant' to Dylan. Dylan stressed the missing economic contribution from his father and the resulting social immobility he experienced. The two also tried to establish a relationship, not without some tensions. Dylan tried to bring this man, whom he did not really know, back into his life as the grandfather of his daughters. Dylan, in allowing his father to establish a relationship with his daughters, was thus able to bring him back into his life in a partial vindication of his paternal role. Dylan's own position was informed by his experience as son and stepson: Dylan succeeded in having his son coming to his flat to spend a day with his sisters and he took care of Madeline's toddler.

While the terms of consanguineal relationships are understood according to genealogical attributes, certain practices which match with these roles create consanguine-like relations. These are not 'acts of kinship', in the sense of 'acts [that] stand out within the stream of practice as marked and often irreversible.' (Lambek 2011, 3) It is precisely their being unexceptional that allows them to be constitutive of step-parenthood. Moreover, they can establish relations that a consanguine's previous absence undermined, such for Dylan 'allowing' his parent to be his father. Rather than the reciprocal relations of asking and receiving amongst other consanguines, parenthood is established by a unilateral form of giving – providing for one's offspring when they are young⁵⁰. The one who gives

⁴⁹ Philogene Heron recorded another version of the same phrase in Dominica, 'love the cat take the kittens' (2017, 99), as reserved for step-fathers

⁵⁰ This 'giving' is inscribed within an intergenerational mutuality. On one hand, I found parent's care for offspring as understood as giving what has (or as a positive rejection of

becomes the 'real' father. This understanding further complicates the ways in which kinship is practiced: if parenthood (as underlined by consanguinity) is understood as a fact of nature, it can nonetheless be contested and redefined through certain practices. Such practices can thus define parenthood beyond biological connections.

Madeline and her mother mutually supported each other during their lifetime, alongside other forms of transactions (e.g. paying instalments for their television). Fatherhood is understood as established and maintained through providing for a child. In this sense, when stepfathers take the place of the biological father in providing for dependent children, they are effectively considered to be fathers. In the case of parenthood, closeness (and therefore amity) between family members is maintained more through dependability than through the avoidances and distancing which alleviate tensions in other close family relationships (those characterised by mutuality).

3.6 Baby parents

Madeline and Dylan were parents themselves. Together they had two daughters who attended elementary school. When the younger daughter was one year old, Dylan left Madeline and moved in with his former girlfriend Tina (#15) and the two had a son, Dylan Jr. Meanwhile, Madeline had a relationship with a man, from whom she also had a son. 'Ah was living with [her son's] father, yes I can't go no way, Ah hav to stay inna di house, one time when Ah go, when Ah come back [he] beat up, beat up beat up!⁵¹, so she 'brok op wit he' ['broke up with him'] and moved in with her mother. Then, Dylan also ended his relationship and subsequently went back to live with Madeline. They both had to negotiate their relationships with their

what has not) been received once by one's parents. On the other, there is an understanding that once children are grown up they will take care of their elderly parents.

⁵¹ 'I was living with [her son's] father, yes I couldn't go anywhere, I had to stay in the house, if I went out, when I came back he beat me up, beat me up, beat me up!'

former partners as 'baby mother' and 'baby father', as parents of their children. Accordingly, a portion of the flow of cash that was centred around Dylan and Madeline was the 'baby money' that she received from her baby father, and the 'baby money' that Dylan handed to his baby mother. This was a source of tensions between the two, as well as between them and their respective children's parents.

Madeline had to put pressure her baby father, who was working for the city council, with the threat of going to a family court and legally obtaining alimony. She borrowed my bike and carried her toddler to the man's dwelling or waited for him with the infant near her block to receive his contribution every two weeks. I heard her talking with him on the phone, sometimes angrily, rejecting his excuses and forcing him to hand over the cash in time: 'Yoo giv me di moni! Bring di 50 dalas fi di pikni! No tel me raaaas!'⁵².

Dylan also had to provide for his two-year-old son, and he struggled to get some money together to give to his baby mother. Indeed, the first time I met her, she was near Dylan's dwelling waiting to receive maintenance from him. Dylan wanted to hold his son but she left him in his father's arms for only a few seconds. Dylan was visibly hurt, but later he succeeded in having Dylan Jr. coming to his flat: he was happy that all his children could enjoy some moments playing together. Dylan tried to have his son 'close' to him while bringing his 'sets' of children together in an attempt not to repeat his father's mistakes (cf. Chamberlain 2003, 349).

Nonetheless, the possibility and frequency with which these fathers saw their sons was closely related to the economic contribution they made to their children's upbringing. In the case of Madeline and Dylan, Madeline managed the money in the house. Therefore, Dylan's payments to his baby mother were scrutinized by her, and this resulted in tensions between the couple. In Belize, the common understanding is that within the household it is the

⁵² 'You give me the money! Bring the 50 dollars for the child! Don't tell me any bullshiiiiit!'

woman who oversees the administration of the finances⁵³, fulfilling a 'managerial' role recognized elsewhere in the Caribbean (Berleant-Shiller and Maurer 1993). Madeline and Dylan were not exception to this; according to him, she was 'the bank'. '*Yu laiyad!*' ('You liar!'), she used to say to him, either seriously or with a joking tone, constantly questioning the amount of change he brought back after any purchase she had sent him to make. As parents, they educated their daughters accordingly. Madeline used to punish her daughters for mishandling cash when sent to buy groceries at the shop. Dylan praised his younger daughter for her thriftiness and criticized the elder girl on the same basis.

Dylan's contribution to his baby mother depended on his fluctuating income and had to be negotiated with Madeline. These tensions intertwine with the potential sexual implications of seeing an ex-partner, and with the recognition of the financial conditions of the parties involved. Paternal financial contributions have emotional implications. Indeed, fathers see and to a degree 'know' and are 'close' to their children, to the extent to which they can financially contribute to their upbringing⁵⁴. These fathers mostly see their offspring either when they deliver their allowance, or during the mothers' visits to collect baby money with their children in tow.

One day, I heard a female voice yelling 'Dylan' while approaching his house. It was Tina, Dylan's former partner and baby mother, on her bike with Dylan Jr (her and Dylan's son). She recounted her trip to the southernmost district, where she had visited her father's side of her family for Easter. Tina asked if Dylan was upstairs, and if it was him who I 'came to deal' with. I answered

⁵³ A member of the Women's Department (Ministry of Human Development) specified on this point: 'I would say that they [women] are the managers, although they do not have a salary of their own. But there some instances in which there is a violence toward them, these situations are the worst, when they have to ensure they get something from their partners. Even if women mange the money they do not have of their own, so I would say that they are controlled. So, many times there is insecurity on when, how much and what to expect to get. Women many times, due to this insecurity, have to "stretch their dollar".'

⁵⁴ See Philogene Heron (2017, ch. 4) for a discussion of the 'complex and contradicted tapestry of creative paternal labour' (Ibid. 127) in the Caribbean.

in the affirmative to the first question and I told her that I would check if he was at home.

When I tell Dylan, who is in the kitchen with Madeline, that Tina is looking for him, Madeline's face turns tense 'Weh shee waahn agen?'⁵⁵, suggesting that she does not need money from him since she could afford to take her recent trip. 'Mek Ah go fi see what she waahn'⁵⁶ Dylan proposes, but Madeline denies him the chance and runs downstairs. Dylan agrees with me that Madeline is jealous, and we laugh while she is away.

Madeline told Tina that Dylan is not at home and the two discuss: 'Ah noh waahn swet ahn...'⁵⁷ Dylan argues, and she turns to me, half angry and half joking: 'Y[o]u hear Joseph!?'.

Dylan borrows my bike for an errand, and I am left on the sofa chatting with Madeline, who is sitting on a chair in the kitchen. She doesn't like when Tina, her former best friend, comes here to see Dylan. Indeed, she thinks that Tina does it too often.

'Ah noh laik shee fi kohn here, shee waahn Dylan yu noa!? Wen shee waahn si ahn, shee can meet he sohnweh els! Nat here!'⁵⁸

Madeline is quite upset, she continues to give vent to her feelings, and recounts her situation before Dylan came back to live with her, when he was living with Tina, less than a year and a half ago:

'Hmmm! Wen he mi liv wit shee, ih kyaahn kohn ya! Shee no waahn Joseph! She seh "Noh goh da dat bitch!" an all kinda

⁵⁵ 'What does she want again?'

⁵⁶ 'Let me go to see what she wants.'

⁵⁷ 'I don't want to have sex with her...'

⁵⁸ 'I don't like her coming here, she wants Dylan, you know!? When she wants to see him, she can meet him somewhere else! Not here!'

tings!⁵⁹ Ah kyaahn get mi baybi moni! Ah have to carry mi pikni down so fi get mi moni, an she take all di moni fan he!⁶⁰

Giuseppe 'But if he goes to Tina's house, that won't make you more jealous?'

Madeline 'No Joseph! 'Cause how Ah know dat! Ah no noa if he gwain so! If yu hav pikni fan [my partner], an fan another gyal, yu tink she wahn laik if di neks gyal kom fi hail you?'⁶¹

G. '..no...'

M. 'No! You see!?'

Indeed, baby money has to be negotiated not only between baby fathers and mothers, but also between co-habiting couples. The partner of a male parent can supplement or deplete the resources that are given to the other female parent in a hand-to-mouth economy, but they also generate tension as to who and how the relations that these resources entail need to be handed. These frictions arise from prescribed parental roles that stress providing as defining feature, in contrast with the undesired dependency from consanguines. Amity, either between siblings or between parents and children, is the emotional outcome of relationships which are partially managed in conjunction with material resources. Recognising the role of personal biographies and feelings as constitutive of these relations that aim at

⁵⁹ See Kerns on women objections to their spouse contributing to his other children, and the 'logical inconsistency' (1983, 116) when their position is reversed. I take the relevance of the household in analytical terms as fruitful insofar as it shows the consequences of the residential positionality of mothers and fathers in relation to their children. Therefore, rather than focusing on the household, I privilege a focus on parents-prole relationships as mediated by parent's relationships to each other.

⁶⁰ 'Hmmm! When he was living with her, he couldn't come here! She didn't want Joseph! She said: "Don't go to that bitch! And all kind of things! I couldn't get my baby money! I had to carry my children down there [Southside] to get my money, and she took already all the money from him!'

⁶¹ No Joseph! Because how I would know that [he went]! I don't know if he is going there! If you had children from [my partner], and from another girl, do you think she would like that the other girl would come and look for you?'

amity nuances an understanding of everyday practices as maximizing efforts.

3.7 Neighbours

Madeline was not employed while I was on fieldwork. However, she braided and twisted hair between two and four times a month, earning around 50 \$. Her customers were usually, but not exclusively, her mother's female friends and next-door neighbours. When in need of cash, she would borrow small amounts from a lady who was an old acquaintance.⁶²

Dylan used to work occasionally in the construction industry (see Ch. 2). At times, he worked as handyman close to home for a neighbour, or with an acquaintance or friend who asked him to help with something (e.g. welding or carpentry). Sometimes, running errands for wealthier neighbours also provided an opportunity for some small earnings. He could count on the contribution of old acquaintances living and working in the vicinity of his neighbourhood: a security guard at a store, a DJ friend from his mother's alley, a jewellery shop owner, or a couple that owned a bar. Dylan also asked for help from the local 'Big Man', his neighbour and an influential figure in the local gang. This 'Big Man's' girlfriend was also a 'cousin' of Dylan (daughter of his mother's), and although he did not ask her directly for money, she occasionally gave some to his eldest daughter since she 'liked' her. Therefore, it was not only family members who would make occasional monetary contributions to Dylan's household. According to him, acquaintances were prompted to give him money because they were 'conscious' or aware of his economic situation. Some were friends from school that were now employed. Others were those with a better economic position than him whom he had known through previous jobs, the kind of friends who, Dylan explained, 'see me and they meet me and give me something'. This was a way of 'looking out for each other', as they knew that

⁶² She also had other acquaintances whom she knew around the city and who would 'help' her occasionally, but I could not grasp the nature and extent of these relationships.

Dylan was struggling financially and reasoned, based upon their mutual conditions, that 'today is for you, tomorrow is for me'. Dylan recognized that his condition is what enabled him to collect money, as 'most of the time people help me due to the kids right?' This understanding of diffused solidarity, of friendship as mutual understanding that flows into giving, underlies amicable relationships. If relationships with family ought to be amicable, depends on their practices of implied mutuality, amicable relations with non-consanguines are also constituted through practising mutuality. How much to ask or expect, was a matter of personal histories and mutual relations in economic terms, as much as circumstantial conditions. Thus, in using an all-encompassing term of neighbours I refer to a variegated kind of relationship. However, what these relations have in common is their being in close, constant proximity as neighbours, and being understood and acted upon according to a familiarity gained through reciprocal recognition gained over the long term.

At the same time, moral evaluations of each other's behaviours were applied depending on the nature of the relationship, and followed the same logic applicable to other non-consanguines which I detail below. These relationships arose within in a matrix of daily interaction and continuous flow of information (gossip) which facilitated and informed mutual judgment and expectations.

The area where Madeline and Dylan lived was inhabited by a mix of mainly poor and working-class people, 'people who need to work fi [to] live' as Dylan put it (in contrast with people for whom others work). Alongside their dwellings, a mix of wooden one or two-storey houses and three or four-storey cement buildings, there were restaurants and hotels, banks, insurance companies and attorney's offices, and other commercial businesses. Compared with other areas of the city, more clearly commercial or residential nature, this neighbourhood was characterized by a busy daily life, when its inhabitants and people coming from other parts of the city would meet on its sidewalks, and a fairly quiet nightlife, when it was mainly

its residents who lined on its streets until nine in the evening, at which point most of the grocery shops closed, signalling that the day had come to an end and it was time to go back inside.

People's identification with a place in the city started with a macro division between Southside and Northside, in reference to the river that longitudinally divides the city. These reference points were followed by divisions based upon political constituencies. The most specific identification, however, was with a particular street or alley. Indeed, the most frequent friendly relations that Dylan and Madeline maintained were at this level, with the people living in the same or nearby streets.

As seen in the introductory ethnographic vignette, pieces of cake were also distributed to non-kin. The next-door neighbours were a couple with children whom Madeline and Dylan had known for a long time and were living in the building before Madeline and Dylan had taken the flat. Sending them a cake was a sign of respect, due because of their proximity and as a sign of a good relationship. The upstairs neighbour was a woman close to Madeline in age, who often socialized with her, and was pregnant at the time of Madeline's birthday. Positively disposed towards each other, they entertained daily interactions until, after she gave birth, she moved from the flat and left her partner who had been abusing her. She sometimes came to Madeline's flat for a plate of food, and the two helped each other. Once, during election time, after asking me for a cigarette she complained about the fact that 'Madeline collect from the [political party name] ten dollas, it was for share, but she give me no nothing. We are supposed to share like sisters!'. Here, again, expected behaviour of acquaintances (living in proximity) is expressed in the language of kinship. More broadly, such language is evident from one of the ways acquaintances are commonly greeted: 'Yes family!'

Madeline also sent a piece to two other neighbours, living on the same floor. One was a woman living with her partner and son of elementary school age, through whom Madeline had found the flat. The other was her elderly

mother, who sold home-baked products. At times, she gave some of it to the couple for free. She asked Dylan to do little chores from time to time, such as taking her garbage downstairs, for few dollars. When the lady got ill, and was unable to bake, her daughter oversaw cooking and asked Dylan and Madeline for assistance (for instance to grate coconut in exchange for few dollars and plantains). After some days of indisposition, the elderly lady died. When I learned about this from Dylan and Madeline, I could see their sorrow, and I was sad myself for the demise of the smiling lady whose Journey Cakes⁶³ I had tasted. A few days later, in their flat, they told me how things had turned out:

Madeline Tell di man bout di burial Dylan!⁶⁴

Dylan Yes, they buried today Ms [elderly neighbour]. No one around knew. The lady who sells cakes [on the same street] went, she is the only one, that is how I know. We wanted to show respect and love, right? But she show bad face.

Giuseppe Who? Ms. [daughter].

D. Yes. Like we make Ms [elderly neighbour] die. She [the daughter] is wicked right? You don't do such t[h]ings with your mother's dead.

M. Yes. She have a bad attitude!

D. Mis [elderly neighbour] was good, she always knock at my door and gimme some Johnny Cakes for my kids, right?! And we study together, that is why I have all this Jehovah Witness books.

M. And she always say 'Hi' to Joseph, true babes? She always

⁶³ Journey/Johnny Cake: bread made of a wheat flour and baking powder base, flat and round (of the diameter of a tea cup), is often cut in half and stuffed with ham, cheese and eggs. Curiously, the first time I ate the lady's cakes was at the working day described in chapter 1. Since I was not expecting to work I did not have any packed lunch. Dylan put under the sun some cakes to get rid of some feasting ants and gave me half of them: 'We share like brothers Joseph!'

⁶⁴ Tell the man about the burial Dylan!

smile[d].

D. I don't know why she didn't let we, not only we, all the people around, to pay her respect and love.

Dylan and Madeline stressed their affection for the lady and disapproval for her daughter's behaviour. The lady had been affable, she greeted and smiled at them, talked about religion with Dylan, and helped the couple. Her daughter's choice of having a 'private' funeral and wake was therefore objectionable. The matter was not (only) personal since the daughter had failed to invite not only them, but 'all the people around': her and her late mother's neighbours. Thus, she was 'wicked', she 'show[ed] a bad face'.

The bad face/mind/attitude⁶⁵ lexicon is used here again to describe improper behaviour: not allowing people to show 'respect and love', to pay homage to the deceased person, is to be 'wicked', to have a bad attitude. In these cases, the negative judgment is aimed at someone who did not allow for a degree of reciprocity between the deceased and their neighbours, as expected from people who had lived in close proximity to one another.

Madeline also sent a piece of cake to a 'friend' of hers. The two had met at the gambling table nearby the flat, where Madeline often socialized and played *Pitty pat*, a popular card game, with other neighbours. The lady was 'tricking' a shop owner, and getting some money from him each month. Without going into detail, she had asked help from Madeline, who carried a letter to the man and received money from him, earning a percentage of the total. This lady sometimes came to Madeline's flat, and they had a good relationship, reinforced through 'working' together.

⁶⁵ These terms refer to a way of being based on a way of acting ('showing'), that can be qualified as harmful (bad). Mind (*main* in Belizean Kriol), means a 'way of thinking' as well as 'looking after', attitude as well as face (*fays*) expresses one's disposition towards others. Notably, the adjective *faysi* means 'shamelessly bold, brazen, disrespectful, impudent' (Crosbie et al. 2007).

A piece of cake also went to a friend of Dylan's sisters, an old acquaintance (from the alley) who would have surely got together with Dylan's sisters to celebrate. (She also came to celebrate Dylan's birthday in his flat, together with his three sisters and another neighbourhood friend of theirs). They sent her the cake as they had known her for a long time, and predicted that she would have judged Madeline as having a 'bad attitude' if she had not shared with her.

'Bad mind' is a common phrasing through the Anglophone Caribbean used to express a negative judgment towards people acting out of jealousy, grudge and envy. Rather than corresponding to a clear moral system, bad mind is a moral register applied subjectively to concrete situations, based on 'parameters of concern [that] are autobiographical and dependent on the context of situation' (Wardle Forthcoming). Madeline's concerns of being judged show the possible consequences of improper behaviour for one's reputation. The deceased neighbour's daughter contravened what was expected from her as Madeline and Dylan's (likewise others') neighbour, acting as if they themselves had harmed her. Notably, such judgement is applied to relations between non-kin and between affines, but not consanguines. Dylan accordingly stressed that his sisters had not 'shown a bad face' to their sister-in-law (Madeline), but judged his aunt-in-law (Madeline's mother's sister) on similar terms.

The use of 'bad mind' for non-consanguines can be traced back to its connection to *obeah* (sorcery) (Crosson 2015, 168), a common phenomenon across the Anglophone Caribbean. When people with 'bad mind' experience envy, it can lead them to use obeah (Wardle Forthcoming). In the case of Belize, belief in obeah (Bullard 1974; Bonander et al. 2000)⁶⁶ has been noted as common to all ethnic groups (Maraesa 2012, 2009). In particular, the perceived use of obeah by Garifuna is not surprising. In fact, Garifuna

⁶⁶ Accounts of obeah in Belize trace back to the times in was known as the British settlement in the Bay of Honduras: in 1791 it was also banned because associated with rebellion (similarly to other Caribbean countries) (Bolland 2003, 29, 62, 85) and is still considered a 'petty misdemeanour' (Handler and Bilby 2012, 97) in the legislation (even if hardly enacted).

possession rituals (*dogu*) were seen as 'idolatrous and uncivilized' (Shoman 2011, 115) since colonial times, and their association with evil and demonic influences unfortunately holds true today (Bassett 2016; Humes 2016)⁶⁷. Kern's work is again an important point of reference. It is true that she does not write about obeah (instead, she uses 'sorcery' as a translation of the Garifuna word *abíñagaü* [Kerns 1983, 79]). Nonetheless, some of the practices she attributes to sorcery are consistent with the practice of obeah in Belize (cf. Kerns 1983, 80, 91, 99, 130; with Maraesa 2009, 232). Moreover, Kerns' (1983, 128) observation that extended family members never accuse each other of sorcery, except for the affines, is consistent with the parallel between obeah and 'bad mind' which I propose here.

In Belize City, obeah was deemed to be also, but not only or mainly, practised by Garifuna. Among Dylan and Madeline's relatives and acquaintances, beliefs in obeah were as much present as the use of the 'bad mind' language. For instance, once Madeline's cousin (#P) and I stopped at a shop to buy drinks. A man I knew, who usually socialized nearby and made a living running errands for neighbours, entered and asked me to buy him a beer. She immediately cursed him, and while I was trying to calm the situation saying that we were 'straight' (i.e. on good terms), she admonished him: 'Joseph no hav noting for yo! Stop fi hasl he! Ah whan oabya yo!'⁶⁸. As we walked away the two continued a tense exchange of words. He explained the seriousness of the matter the next time I saw him. He told me that his anger could have led to physical violence and warned me: 'Don't bring dis gyal close to me again. "Ah wahn oabya yo!", da who she wahn oabya? I smoke weed and I smoke it in a fronto!⁶⁹. He then specified disdainfully: 'I

⁶⁷ The social life of Garifuna in Belize, and elsewhere in Central America, has been seen as backwards since colonial times (Anderson 1997), with authorities shifting attitudes from the use of legislative devices limiting their stay in Belize City (Belize Town at the time) because they were seen as a threat to the colonial order, to depictions of them as hard-working and close to the British when their labour was needed (Moberg 1992, 4).

⁶⁸ 'Joseph doesn't have anything for you! Stop to hassle him [or] I will obeah you!'

⁶⁹ 'Don't bring this girl close to me again. "I will obeah you!", who does she want to obeah? I smoke weed [marijuana] and I smoke it in a fronto [i.e. tobacco leaf]!'

don't give a shit about this people from Hopkins [a Garifuna village] or Blablabla!'. I do not wish to overemphasize the belief in obeah or the threat of its use, which I found only occasionally voiced in Belize City (and never witnessed its practice). Nonetheless, obeah as ritualized practice and bad mind as everyday moral qualifier are related as part of a moral continuum manifested in everyday language. As Wardle notes, obeah can be taken to be “bad mind” *in extremis*—an exercise in the reach and effects of evil thought carried beyond everyday moral limits’ (Wardle Forthcoming). Moreover, the overlap between the two corresponds to the ways in which people can be judged or accused of this behaviour: only non-consanguines can be suspected of or threatened with the practice of obeah, and only non-consanguines can be labelled as ‘bad minded’.

I wish to return to the more general use of ‘bad mind’ beyond its association with the ‘wicked art’ (Handler and Bilby 2012, 96) of obeah, as a moral judgement of people guilty of certain types of action. According to Wardle, the opposite of ‘bad mind’ is the positively evaluated behaviour of “giving away” something of oneself or one’s own to others’ (4) within a ‘roundabout or circular causality’ (Ibid.) (what comes around goes around). This moral disposition of giving is called ‘sympathy’ in Jamaica. The reverse, ‘taking away’, is having a bad attitude. I argue that taking away involves withdrawing not only from a ‘circular causality’, but also from a relationship that implies mutuality – rejecting the principle of ‘today is for you, tomorrow is for me’, as Dylan put it. Thus, refusing to act reciprocally, in relation to either spiritual (e.g. ‘respect and love’) or material (e.g. money goods, leads to a moral judgment expressed through the language of bad face, mind and attitude.

Among different perceptions of marijuana use through the Caribbean (Dreher and Rogers 1976), it is also considered as a plant that (smoked or ingested) has healing effects, both physically and spiritually (Rubin and Comitas 1975), and especially for Rastafarians (Chevannes 1994, 199). I have not found a reference to marijuana as contrasting obeah in the literature, but it is not surprising that it has a place in the combination and mixtures of objects and perception of obeah (Wisecup and Jaudon 2015) in its historical and geographical mobility and fluidity of forms across the Caribbean (Burnham 2015).

A relationship between neighbours is not codified and does not imply a contractual obligation; like friendship, it only depends on 'individual personalities and moral sensibilities' (Pitt-Rivers 2016, 447). These moral sensibilities find expression in the 'bad mind' language. Relationships between kin, friends and neighbours are reciprocal in the sense that acts of altruism or generosity should be mutual, are understood as diffuse and nonspecific in terms of time and quantity, and their practice depends on the circumstances of the actors involved. Relations between non-consanguineal neighbours can be understood through Maussian analysis of the gift insofar as they are reciprocal, and they establish relationships by means of exchange (generalized rather than codified or ritualized) underlined by a moral logic that values giving. 'Bad mind' people are judged according to actions that appear to be taking something away: part of oneself (Lévi-Strauss 1987) or even the possibility to reciprocate something in return (e.g. 'pay respect'). Parry notes that the gift itself might contain something of the donor even if only 'in the loose sense that it may be interpreted as an objective manifestation of his [/her] subjective dispositions' (Parry 1986, 463). However, here it is the *act* of giving (or taking away) that shows the giver's disposition.

Amity as the outcome of relations is thus strived for through either withdrawing from or participating in relations of mutuality. The distinctions between consanguines and non-consanguines are not based so much on different ideas about altruism at this level. Rather, when subjects understand their relationship as implying a principle of mutuality (i.e. they are consanguineous), its contravention does not follow a moral evaluation of the person. Practice threatens amity but does not imply a moral judgement about the person. When two people's relationship is based on the principle of mutuality (friends and neighbours), they evaluate themselves using a moral register. From this perspective, it is easier to understand why, while both Madeline and Dylan understood her aunt's behaviour as inappropriate, Madeline suggested a way to mediate the relationship in

practice on the basis of its material outcomes, while Dylan dismissed her aunt's requests as showing bad mind.

Moral judgment per se is not dependent on proximity (as it is not the mutuality between consanguines) but serves to evaluate specific individuals according to their lived experience in concrete situations. The relationships at stake using this everyday moral language were enabled and reinforced by the physical proximity of the actors involved. Excluding the years that Dylan spent at the childcare centre and with the mother of his son, both Dylan and Madeline had dwelled around their area for most of their lives. They had both lived in the alley across the street (where Dylan's sisters lived), and their other dwellings since childhood were not more than approximately 500 meters from the building in which they lived during my fieldwork. Their daily lives also centred around their building. Their daughters' school was few meters away, and once, while going with Dylan and his family to a religious meeting in an adjacent road, after five minutes walking, the eldest managed to get a smile from us asking: '*Dad, dis still da Bileez?*' ('Dad, is this still Belize City?'). Not used to the surrounding streets, which she did not cross in her daily walks to and from school, her aunties' houses or the shop, she thought we were leaving the city.

At this level of proximity, mutual aid between neighbours was also easily identifiable in simple acts of sharing food with a visitor or sheltering a person in need. Once Madeline was hosting a teenager girl, who was having troubles with her partner. Dylan stressed the fact that this was not their 'business', not so much because he was against in helping her, rather because he did not want to 'look like' they were hiding her. In fact, another important aspect of living in physical proximity was the ease by which information flowed between people. The *gasip*, *shush*, or *taak op bowt*, the constant gossip taking place, was the main form that such flows took. As seen, Dylan discovered about the funeral of his neighbour from a lady living in the same street, and he was also worried because he might have seemed to be hiding a teenager, if the word had spread. While socializing either inside a flat or

house, in a yard or on the street, information about one's neighbours (including their financial situation) circulated easily, either in an extensive manner through a conversation, or in the form of a quick comment while passing by. When indoors, people also took care to lower their voices when commotion was heard from outside or inside the building, in order to capture bits of the conversation. Children, who often came and went as they went about chores and errands, were both messengers and collectors of information, and at times were sent specifically to listen to what was happening in the streets. Without surprise, my landlady sometimes already knew where I had been when I returned home.

The circulation of news was useful in terms of knowing what happened to whom, how relations in one's proximity developed, but also who was saying what about whom. As seen with the concerns of Dylan for the young woman sheltered by Madeline, gossip was also a mean of control, and it was not difficult to trace a person's whereabouts. It was not only the content of what had been shared that was important but also the identity of the person who disseminated it. Thus, information circulating about people in the neighbourhood reinforced mutual understandings of relationships.

The personal aspect of gossip was once again evident to me when chatting with Dylan about his relatives. He told me that one of his female 'cousins' was living in one of the flats in Madeline's aunt's (#1) yard. He specified to me that she was 'not really a cousin', but Dylan's mother had raised her before she migrated to the USA. At first, she did not recognize Dylan and was talking negatively to Madeline about him. Dylan was the son of the lady who once took care of her she changed her attitude. Indeed, once she realized that, she stopped saying negative things about him because of her affection for Dylan's late mother.

Shush can be in itself a way to identify 'bad mind' people. Knowing that someone was talking negatively about you, therefore actively promoting a negative image (i.e. harming your reputation) through gossiping, was

another aspect of these flows of information. Moreover, it was gossip that facilitated a positive or negative judgement of someone else, providing an effective means for social control. Knowledge about someone's opinions or behaviour easily circulated through such talk, facilitating judgements between neighbourhood residents about each other. In terms of 'bad mind', gossip is both a for knowing who is 'bad mind' and an indicator of 'bad mind' in itself. However, it also has the potential of revealing unexpected proximity, as in the case of Dylan's mother's past as a foster carer, the memory of which was able to create bonds between two people long after her departure.

Conclusion

Through a detailed ethnography of everyday interactions, I have shown the economic significance of relationships between kin and between non-kin. I built upon the previous chapter which situated the attainment of economic resources in terms of waged and wageless work through movement within relationships dispersed in the urban milieu. In this chapter, I have explored the underlying understandings that guide expectations of and negotiations with people in the neighbourhood, looking particularly at dependability upon others (consanguines, affines and non-kin) and the different ways in which such a condition is negotiated. I have given a nuanced analysis of the economic, affective and moral conditions that underline the everyday life of a labourer and his partner within their familiar relationships grounded in their long-term residency in a neighbourhood of Belize City.

In the next chapter, I will turn to the relationships established by a recently arrived migrant and his family. I focus on the nature of the relationships that they established in Belize City, which were fewer in number and scope than for those who have more established lives in the city, as well as the kin ties that such migrants negotiated across borders.

Kinship charts

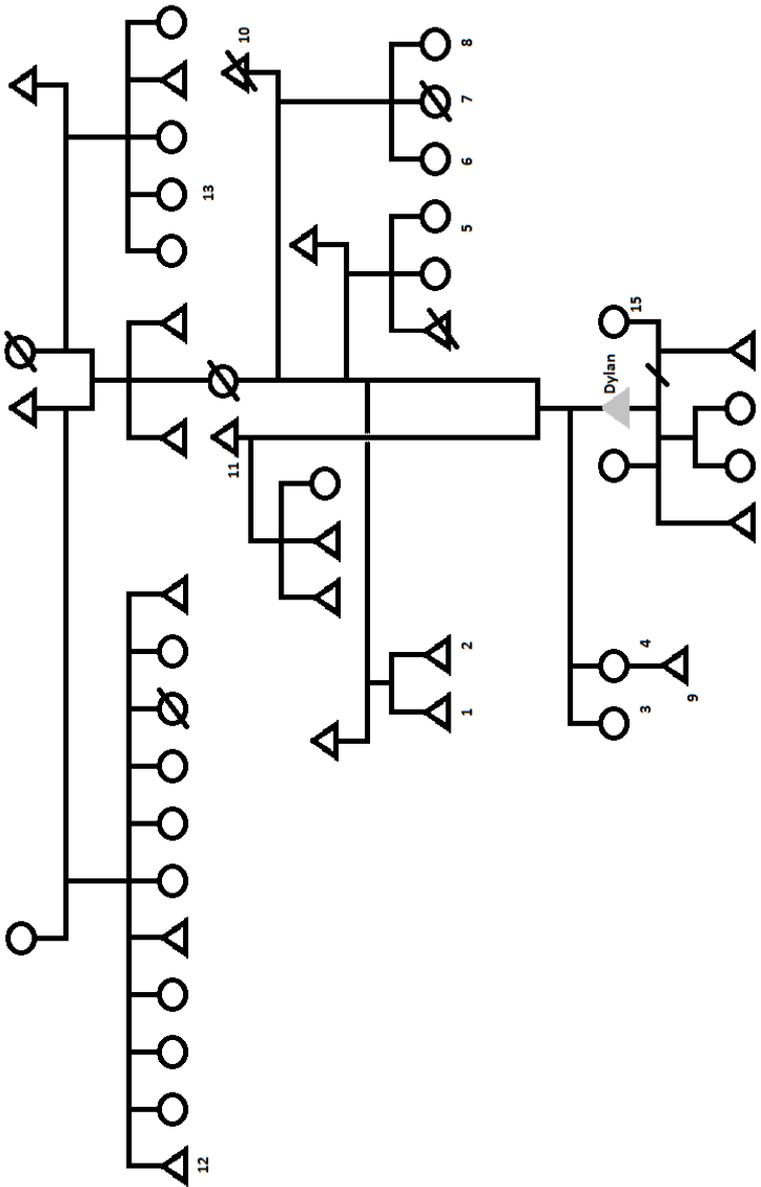


Chart 3 Dylan kinship diagram

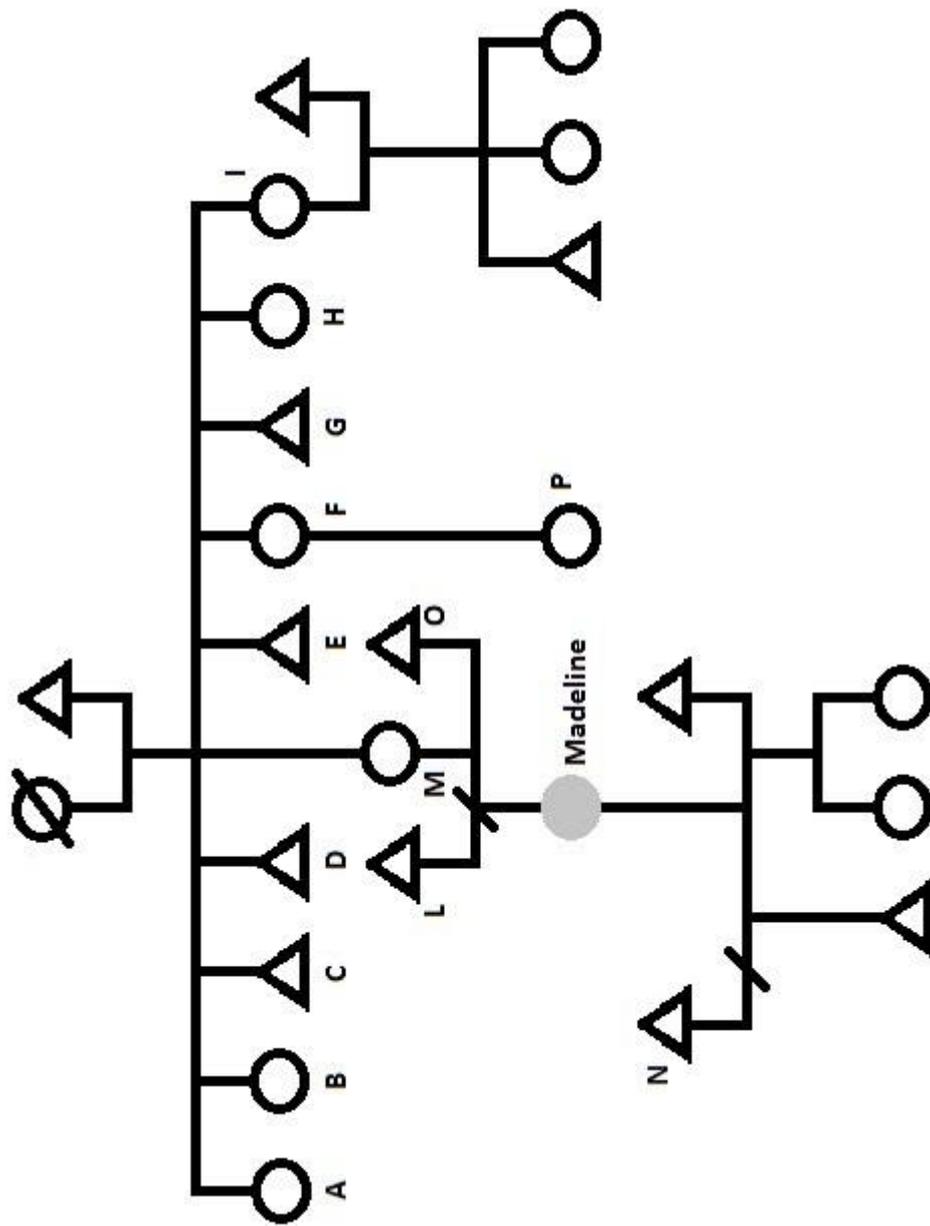


Chart 4 Madeline kinship diagram

Chapter 4. A birthday party

4.1 The party

Javier called me one March afternoon (2016) to invite me to celebrate the twelfth birthday of his oldest son. In the evening, I got on my bike, crossed the river and entered the Southside of Belize City. I went down a paved street and then an unpaved one. I crossed a few wooden boards over a low canal on foot, reaching a small alley that led into an open yard with two concrete houses. Javier lived in the ground-floor flat of one of the houses with his thirty-five-year-old wife Alejandra (equal in age to him), along with her mother, their two sons and a daughter.

The couple welcomed me at the yard's entrance, and introduced me to Carlos and his partner, who had come with their daughter. I joined them chatting and was immediately transported back to the building site. It was not uncommon to hear talk about work outside the workplace (or about workers common acquaintances). Javier was recounting an episode on the building site: 'he tells me "You have to do it now" (*Tienes que hacerlo ahora*)', I tell him "Look, I'm going to do it but not now, if you want it now you can go to hell!", he says that he wants it now, so I tell him to go....!' I continued listening to them criticise the arrogance of Matthew, the skilled worker about whom Javier was cussing and who was not present at the party.

Carlos, a Salvadoran man in his mid-thirties nicknamed *Flaco* (slim) for his tall, thin figure, had returned the same day from a village in Cayo district, where he looked after the property of Mr. Juan, the contractor. Tired of the small allowance he received there, and of not being able to find other work because of the relative isolation of the place, he had decided to come back to the

city with his spouse⁷⁰ and young daughter. Describing how his relationship with Juan had deteriorated, he was bitterly commenting that Juan used to be an honest man, but now `se *puso mentiroso*' ('he became a liar'). Carlos had met Javier in front of the pawn shop where Javier used to work as a security guard and it was Carlos who introduced him to Juan.

Although Carlos was no longer a part of Juan's work crew, he often got together with Javier and the other workers for a drink, or he met their families in a park in the weekend to enjoy the evening breeze and some Central American street food while their children played together in the open.

Carlos' child was playing with Javier's six and twelve-years-old sons and sixteen-year-old daughter, together with two teenage girls. Javier's *cuñado*⁷¹ (brother-in-law), **Pedro**, chatted with them. Alejandra and Pedro were biologically unrelated, but they grew up together in the same house since Alejandra's mother had taken care of him since he was a child. Alejandra considered him an *hermano* (brother), and he was the only sibling in her mother's house. In fact, Alejandra was her mother's only child. She recounted how her father was the epitome of the Honduran man. Apparently, he had fathered around fifty sons and daughters. In Honduras Alejandra would occasionally meet some of them for the first time, while hearing of new siblings through rumours. She was one of the oldest and was relatively intimate to a brother and a

⁷⁰ Not all these men were legally married with their partners. I found that the legal bond did not hold much importance for cohabiting couples with a longstanding relationship. Thus, I use spouse, rather than wife/husband when referring to these relationships. Since Javier and Alejandra are central to this chapter, I specify that they were in a legally sanctioned marriage.

⁷¹ *Cuñado/a* is a sibling of a person's spouse, and the spouse of a sibling of a person, and more generally a relative in law of any degree, or (especially in some Latin American countries) an affectionate way to address a friend (Real Academia Española 2014). I found used also *concuñado/a* (also *concuño/a*), the spouse or sibling of a person's *cuñado/a* (Ibid.).

sister both close in age to her, but who had not been living with her.

Pedro was also Honduran, in his mid-twenties, and was working as a mechanic in a garage for heavy machinery at the time of my fieldwork. To boost his wage, he occasionally went with Javier to work for Juan, if the contractor needed extra workers during weekends. His two sons, one and three years old, born in Honduras and in Belize respectively, were currently living in Belize with his ex-spouse. He had reached Belize after Javier, and similarly to him held a tourist visa. Hosted and fed at times by his *tíos*⁷² Javier and Alejandra, he was grateful for their hospitality.

When I dropped in for a visit at Javier's house, Pedro was usually sitting in the yard; this is where I found him on the evening of the party. In front of him was the entrance to the kitchen, Javier had painted the wall green using leftover material from some work that we had done together for Juan. Inside the kitchen, Alejandra's elderly mother was cooking, appearing on the doorstep from time to time. Javier had brought her back with him from a visit to Honduras the previous Christmas as a surprise for Alejandra. *Abuela* (grandmother) minded the house and cooked meals. Alejandra's occupation as babysitter and domestic worker meant being at work from early morning to evening most of the week. Likewise, Javier's work in construction stopped him from spending much time with his offspring.

After greeting Alejandra's mother, I remained under the canopy of the house covering the entrance to the kitchen and bedroom.

⁷² *Tío/a* (pl. *tíos*), means primary parent's brother/sister, but it is also used generally to express closeness to a (older) person (Real Academia Española 2014). In a similar fashion, especially aunty (*aanti* in BK) is used by Kriol speakers to refer affectionately to an older woman (this is a common use around the Anglophone Caribbean, see Mühleisen 2005). I take Pedro's use of *tíos* as an affectionate term of reference to Javier and Alejandra.

A small lamp mimicking the effects of a disco ball illuminated the space, projecting colourful light around us, while speakers blared out cumbia, bachata, salsa and reggaetón.

Alejandra served scrambled eggs, rice, salad and bread on plastic plates and we sat to eat. She took Carlos to dance but he quickly sat when Emilio, ever the prankster, entered the yard and started teasing him. Emilio's Guatemalan partner and her three daughters, two teenagers and a child, sat next to each other and were quickly served a plate each.

Even though most of the people referred to him as Salvadoran, **Emilio** told me that he was born in Honduras – 'not many people know about it!'. His family had moved to El Salvador when he was seven years old, and he had spent much of his childhood there. Arriving in Belize at the age of fifteen in the early 1990s, a brother had introduced him to a *paisano* (countryman) with whom he started to work as a helper. After working as a mason, he found employment with a company where he learned welding. Later, he worked for Juan, becoming one of his most stable employees.

Emilio's brother who moved to Belize with him later 'left' him to go the USA. Emilio had lost contact with another brother who had moved to Mexico. There was yet another brother, still living in El Salvador, whom he had seen only once. Due to his sporadic contact with the other members of his family (he recalled having sent remittances only a handful of times), Emilio said that '*aquí lo único que tengo son hijos y nietas*' ('here I've got only sons/daughters and granddaughters'), referring to his granddaughter, only a few months old, and his (and his late Guatemalan spouse's) two sons and daughter in their twenties.

Emilio was also served a plate, and Amadeo arrived to join the party, while those of us who had already eaten were given coke and ice in plastic cups.

It was **Amadeo** who had originally introduced Emilio to Juan. He was also from El Salvador, in his mid-forties, and another of Juan's main workers.

During the party, he explained that he might have gone to work in a big construction project for a foreign company. He was informing the fellow workers about this opportunity: they could have earned more than with Juan since the construction would have lasted for a good while. Indeed, he needed to work, as he had just got out of jail where he was detained because, even after thirteen years living in Belize, he was resident in the country without a visa.

During his imprisonment, he could count on the support of another Salvadoran friend, a neighbour of mine. His wife, from Guatemala, would also ask my Honduran landlady to take care of one of his three children when she could not. Moreover, Emilio supported Amadeo once he was out of prison, accompanying him to visit his spouse still held in the penitentiary for the same reason.

At Emilio's gesture, Carlos and I followed him, we were being invited for some Guatemalan-contraband pilsner that he was buying from a neighbour in a nearby yard. On our way back, Javier spotted us and jokingly declared (since no one had drunk alcohol at the party before then): 'You've already got *embrahvados* with Emilio!', playing with the Spanish word for getting drunk: 'emborracharon' and the name of the beer 'Brahva'.

A plastic table was carried outside, on which Alejandra placed a big birthday cake covered in whipped cream, and the music was lowered to allow for the 'happy birthday' chorus. When Alejandra tried unsuccessfully to light the candles, Emilio organized a human wall against the breeze with the help of the youngest guests. As the second attempt to light the candles was successful, the birthday boy was finally able to blow the flames out. The cake was served to the guests, and Alejandra carried some of it to the neighbours upstairs.

Almost everyone sat in the yard on an old armchair, on a bench between the poles that held up the laminated canopy, or on plastic chairs, stools and buckets. A few young males remained without a seat, some of whom were being lectured by young females about dancing steps.

Alejandra was the most outspoken of all the women and brought irony and laughter to the conversation. As children, mothers and sisters began to leave I was invited to go with Carlos and Emilio, the latter feeling freed from the watchful eye of his evangelical partner, to buy a bottle of rum. Emilio asked me for a small loan, but I felt that it was my turn. I bought a quart of rum and Sprite with my last change, while Carlos bought me some cigarettes. The conversation continued around the table. Apart from teasing each other, possible new working opportunities were being discussed, and of course football (while comments about women were set aside since this was not a male-only gathering). Someone asked if Don Juan was invited, and Javier replied that he had not called him, without giving further reasons. Other remarks concerned the contractor, especially about his ability to manage construction contracts and his understanding of the details of the work.

We chatted until the rum finished and the party petered out. The last guests accompanied Carlos and his family to the paved street before going home. Carlos took a taxi with his family, loading their suitcases into the boot along with a strimmer, that he wished to use for clearing people's yard as a form of self-employment. (In fact, in the following weeks he called by at times for Javier's help).

Apart from Matthew and Juan, there were two other men who formed part of the working crew and whom I was expecting to see at the party, but I did not.

William was a skilled worker regularly employed by Juan, who had known him for many years. He had arrived as an adolescent, fleeing the El Salvador civil war with his parents and siblings. He was now a Belizean citizen and had brothers, sisters and cousins in Belize. His father had died two months previously and he had moved to the countryside, which is perhaps why he had not attended the party.

Marvin, nicknamed either *Bicho* (literally 'bug', 'creature', 'child/adolescent' in Salvadoran Spanish) or *Flaco*, was also absent. He was a twenty-year-old Honduran, who had entered Belize illegally seven months previously, following his father Jaime, who had introduced him to Mr. Juan. I was surprised not to see him since Marvin had lived for few months in the buildings adjacent to William and Carlos dwellings. He had become close to the others whilst working for Mr. Juan, as he stressed to me:

working I've met William, Emilio, Javier. The truth is that they've been, they've been quite...they quite supported me. [...] morally, telling me something that would motivate me against leaving [Belize] because I was [thinking of leaving] at the beginning, no!?

William, for instance, also felt close to Marvin. William was proud of him, as he indicated one evening after work, telling us how he had had an argument with some locals at a bar in San Ignacio town (Cayo district) after a workday. Marvin stood firmly by his side as the argument developed into a fight.

While Marvin's father was probably absent because he was employed as a security guard at night (occasionally doing little jobs, especially on electrical systems, for Juan in the daytime), local gossip gave me a clue about why Marvin himself did not come.

He had become close to the eldest of Emilio's partner's daughters. I was told that her mother was giving extra chores to this young daughter, who had a different father to her two younger sisters and who had apparently been brought illegally into Belize to work for the family. The hearsay was that Marvin's relationship might have seemed to be undermining the mother's ability to exploit the young daughter. Marvin may have therefore avoided the party in order to avoid creating tensions between himself and Emilio's partner.

The extent to which these rumours correspond to the actual state of affairs is not relevant here; rather, they point to how intimate relations contributed to and complicated the bonds between these workers.



Figure 9 From Belchina Bridge. Right: Northside. Left: Southside

The chapter traces this field made up of relations between family members, friends and co-workers. I started this chapter with a description of Javier's son's birthday party in order to give a glimpse of 'the field of relations' (Hastrup and Olwig 1996a, 8) significant to Javier and his wife. This field spans across national borders, encompassing the migratory trajectory of Javier and his family coming from Honduras to Belize, for their life in Belize and their imagined future destination of the USA. The ties that make up this field are actively loosened or strengthened across these borders, rather than remaining uninterrupted (cf. Werbner 2013, 107). The chapter begins by focusing on the relevance of the immediacy of these relations and the sociability by which they are expressed. I situate Javier among family, friends and workers while following his, and his wife's, personal stories. Looking at particular people's creativity and resilience in the realization of their projects serves as a critique of the popular images of Central American migrants in Belize, and of characterizations of migrants in general (Georgiadou 2013, 116–17). Thus, applying an analytical distinction

between economic migrants or refugees would imply a clear difference in terms of how they organized their lives and their motives to move across borders. This is not a refusal to acknowledge the vulnerabilities to which they were subject, rather it is an affirmation of the shared ways in which both economic migrants and refugees were seen and engaged with by others.

The birthday party vignette is also a means to introduce workers who will appear in other chapters. They have all migrated to Belize at different times and under different circumstances, and some did not recognize themselves anymore as migrants. They give a glimpse of the complexity of circumstances and of particular migratory experiences (cf. De Genova 2002, 224) in Belize and in Central America. In focusing on Javier's experience, but juxtaposing it with the distinct experiences of those who had meaningful relations with him, the chapter blurs neat characterisations of migrants as belonging to one specific place when immobile, or as quintessentially mobile, 'out-of-place' with their place 'reinscribed upon their own mobile bodies' (De Genova 2016, 232). Moreover, the chapter recognizes commonalities emerging not from a unified experience which presumes predetermined place-bounded migrant subjects, but grounded in relationships between each other as friends and workers in the everyday aspects of leisure and work. It also suggests that offspring born or raised in the country have a central role in the attachment to place (besides pertinent personal circumstances, age, length of residence in the country and extent of the relationships maintained within and outside of it).

This focus on sociability aims to add to an understanding of migrant's existential conditions. Indeed, a focus on transnationality and return migration has especially (but not exclusively) depicted migrants with their 'feet in two societies' (Foner 1997, 358), living 'dual lives' (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999, 217) 'in between or on "the borderlands"' (Grønseth 2013, 1). Moreover, these approaches are pertinent to the anthropological focus on the articulation between the place of origin and destination of the migrant

(Brettell 2015, 149). These perspectives represent an analytical advancement 'from groups in specific localities to groups and their activities as they engage cross-border, multi-local processes and practices[,] from 'here' to 'here-and-there'.' (Vertovec 2007, 968)⁷³ Thus migrants' (and former-migrants') experiences are in between two poles, physically in between nations, temporarily in a present between a past prior to migration, and a future of migration (or a return to a place of origin). I look at the 'here-and-now' of Javier and his wife as made up of relations, expectations and hopes, and connect it to connect it to a 'there-and-then' in the past as well as in the future, somewhere else. Their envisioned future was neither back in Honduras nor in Belize but would be constituted by other relations that they hoped to strengthen (in this case, with Javier's mother). While keeping this sense of being *in-between* places/life-worlds/temporalities, I look primarily at Javier and Alejandra *within* specific relations as they actively created them in their everyday in Belize City, on the worksite and elsewhere, in light of their personal histories and future aspirations.

The chapter focuses on the present and situates accounts of the past and future in relation to it, while stressing the importance of social relations between family, friends and workers. I describe Javier and Alejandra's arrival in Belize City and their integration into its labour market. In keeping with this focus on work, I look at Javier's ties with his friends and co-workers centred around, but not reduced to, their shared employment. Although sociability is an end in itself (Simmel and Hughes 1949), I pay particular attention to the ways in which men are socially connected through their work, and how work-related matters form an important part of their social interactions. Although these kinds of interactions are not aimed at strengthening work ties per se, they result in collective circulation of information and shared ideas about work. Rather than a sharp distinction between work and leisure time, in terms of an escape from the former via

⁷³ The spatial emphasis on the 'here' and 'there', has provoked a critique of the neat difference between the two (because its localized and distinct character) (Ahmed et al. 2003, 4), as well as giving rise to claims of its validity as describing apparently coherent elements resulting from place-making (McKay 2006, 199).

the latter, leisure time is often concerned with work (and work is equally characterized by leisure moments as I show in the next chapter).

Subsequently, the chapter's discussion shifts to how work-oriented social relations intersect with relationships within the nuclear family and kin at large. In doing so, I expand upon the social aspect of work/leisure time to show how other relationships are equally central to migratory trajectories, attachments to place and everyday life in Belize City. The building of work and friendship ties in Belize City runs parallel (though not disconnected) to the establishment and mediation of kin ties between Honduras, Belize and the United States. Javier's plan to go to the USA must be understood as a familial rather than an individual venture. I follow the account of Javier's and Alejandra's efforts to leave Honduras, negotiating their ties with relatives there, and move to Belize in view of a reunification with Javier's mother in the USA. Their migration was a joint venture carried out with a focus on the nuclear family, while they handled kin ties between the three countries. Subsequently I examine the enmeshment of present concerns (emerging from past expectations) and foreseen circumstances. Javier and Alejandra's concerns related both to their children's education (in particular learning English), and with their legal status in the country. Neither of these aspects can be understood except in relation to their present situation in Belize City and their plan to move to North America. Finally, the chapter tackles the theme of violence. This contributed both to their reasons to move from Honduras and their perception of Belize City, challenging the applicability of clear migratory categories as refugee or economic migrant (cf. Palacio 1988). I conclude by discussing Javier and Alejandra's experience in Belize City, not simply in terms of a backdrop to their experiences but as a place of work, fear *and* tranquillity.

4.2 Getting started

Javier and Alejandra arrived in Belize City in summer 2014. After three months during which they tested the waters, they moved from a rented

room to the flat (where they were living when I met them), taking their two sons and daughter with them. Javier talked of his plans either using the generic plural (*'Nosotros'* – 'we'), or referring to him and his wife (*'Yo con la mujer'* – 'The woman and I'). I look primarily at Javier's perspectives, but I also incorporate those of Alejandra, since they stressed that their decision to move and settle in Belize was a joint venture. Alejandra had been decisive in their migration journey ever since they lived in Honduras. Indeed, they were convinced to move by talking with a friend of hers, who also helped them during the first weeks in Belize City to find a house and *'la chamba'* (employment). Moreover, as their collaborative way of addressing their plan suggests and as I show later in the chapter, this trajectory was seen as a joint one, rather than a personal project, which needed to be carried out with the whole family in mind. In the following, I focus on the occupational aspects of this trajectory, briefly outlining their Honduran past before describing their circumstances in Belize.

When his daughter was still an infant, Javier started to work in a small printing business. He recalled with pride his skills as a printer, and disappointment at the termination of his employment after seven years, for issues related to the payment of a salary. Then he found work as a cable technician in a big company, where he progressed from field to management and office work through hard work and overtime. After four years, another enterprise bought the company and Javier was fired following staff cuts. For the following three years he worked for a textile-printing business, but staff cuts left him jobless again. Then, he was employed for six months as a cashier in a supermarket after which he joined his wife in selling clothes from their house and at the weekly market. Alejandra previously had her *'negocio propio'* (her 'own business'), selling breakfast and lunch at the market. When she shifted to selling clothes, she welcomed Javier's help. *'Nos defendemos'* ('we got by'), he said, and the business was going 'more or less' (*'ma' o meno'*) well when they decided to move to Belize.

Javier and Alejandra ascribed one of the reasons to move to Belize to the shrinking economic opportunities that they encountered in their home country. On arrival they found work in sectors in which Central Americans are customarily employed (Acuña González 2012), within a clear gendered division of labour in unskilled occupations — a tendency already noted in the late 1980s (Shoman 1990, 17). Alejandra worked initially in a food stall and later found a job as a housekeeper and nanny. 'These are the kind of jobs available for us here!', she remarked, referring to the typical circumstances of Central American women. Within the service sector the other common employment, perhaps not explored by Alejandra because of its sexual connotations, is as a *mesera* (waitress). Winters (2010) describes how these women, mainly Honduran and having arrived in Belize City without a male partner, work in bars and establish intimate relationships with their male Belizean clientele. These relationships enable them to maintain transnational families in economic and legal terms. The women strategically negotiate gender normativity between countries while risking exploitation. Winter argues that in Belize City, Central American women's employment in services contributes to the creation of a charming image juxtaposing docility (in streets and houses) and sensuality (in bars).

Javier, worked in security for a while before Juan employed him, even though he did not have experience in construction: 'When Don Juan [the contractor] asked if I ever worked as a construction worker, "No" I said to him "I...mason, welder, painter's work...I don't know about it, I've never done it before coming here" I said to him'. Javier's lack of previous experience in construction points to the strong segmentation of labour in the city, and its reproduction through contacts also relevant for migration and employment (more on this in the next section). It is noteworthy that agro-export has been a major sector of employment for Central Americans in rural Belize (Acuña González 2012, 19–22)⁷⁴, in which men and women find work

⁷⁴ The majority of Central Americans settled in rural areas in the early 1990s (Woods, Perry, and Steagall 1997, 77; see also Shoman 1990, 6). Moberg reported that Central American immigrants to Belize have settled predominantly in "uninhabited rural areas" (1992, 23). In

in distinct job tasks (Medina 2004, 83–85, 97–100, 120–21; Moberg 1997, 122–25).

While a discussion of employment in agriculture is beyond the scope of this thesis, I momentarily turn to the strong association between this kind of occupation and nationality (which overlaps with ethnicity) in Belize City. While contractors recognized that a number of Central Americans were arriving in Belize with some experience in construction, they were also aware that others did not have any such experience. Contractors and Belize-born city dwellers of African descent often imagined Central Americans to have a (sometimes true) long-held tradition of agricultural knowledge, saying that 'Spanish people are machete people,' metonymically substituting nationality (i.e. Salvadoran, Guatemalan etc.) with ethnicity ('Spanish', see Introduction) and a kind of labour associated with a tool. This points to two aspects of how Central American men are perceived in Belize. On the one hand, their willingness to work is seen as morally positive, although some accuse these 'aliens'⁷⁵ of contributing to lower wages or 'steal[ing] work'. On the other, the Central Americans escaping in the past from civil wars (cf. Moberg 1997, 124) and coming from what are perceived as rural backwards were viewed as potentially dangerous men prone to physical violence (cf. Shoman 1990, 9–11). The machete epitomizes these two aspects as both a work tool and a potential weapon. While not suggesting a homogeneous and cohesive view of Central Americans amongst Belizeans, these images of Central American men as hard working but dangerous and women as docile and sensual are widespread. However, Javier and Alejandra's short history of employment in Belize City not only stresses the nature of possibilities available to them but elucidates how these are partially shaped and give rise

2000, of the immigrants in the country around 40 per cent were living in rural Belize, while almost 60 per cent lived in urban areas (Acuña González 2012).

⁷⁵ Note that in Belize City 'alien' is predominantly used to indicate Central American (illegal) migrants in Belize, and rarely if ever applied to people from other countries (see A. Salazar 2000, 14).

to a particular experience in the context of a historical and gendered construction of migration, labour and ethnicity in Belize.

Javier and Alejandra's experiences reflect a pattern according to which migrants were integrated into the labour market in Belize City. Their expectations in Honduras were realistically evaluated against their present conditions. This entailed challenges to their aspirations but did not prevent them from hoping and striving to fulfil them. This sense of tension between a seemingly linear plan and situational constraints runs through the chapter and finds expression in the resilience and re-adjustments that Javier and Alejandra employed vis-à-vis the relationships they established. Especially for Javier, his employment also entailed the creation of relations with workmates, to which I turn in the next section.

4.3 *Cuates y chambeadores*. Work and leisure

Javier's *cuates* (mates) were also fellow *chambeadores* (workers). For him they were '*mis cuates*', 'my mates'. *Cuate* (*cuates* pl.) is a Central American colloquial term that translates in reference to a particular person as 'mate' or 'close friend' (and generally to 'guy'), and derives from the Náhuatl *cóatl* 'serpent', 'twin' (Real Academia Española 2014).

They were also all *chambeadores* (sing. *chambeador*) which means 'workers', especially 'hard and dedicated workers' ('Diccionario del español de México' n.d.; Real Academia Española 2014), and referred to each other as such. *Chamba* is a colloquial Central American and Mexican term that means both 'work' and 'occupation' (Real Academia Española 2014). The derivation is difficult to trace. For De Diego (1955), the colloquial *chamba* – 'stroke of luck', 'bargain' – comes from *chambar* 'change', from the Latin *cambiāre*. However, according to Corominas (1987) it may derive from *chambón*, 'who only wins by trick', which meant mainly 'rude', 'botch', itself probably derived from the ancient Portuguese *chamba* 'foot' (in the sense of

shank, a cheap cut of meat)⁷⁶. However, in its current use, *chambeador* has a positive connotation for the value attributed to working effortlessly (cf. ch. 5). Addressing each other as *chambeador*, these men recognized their common livelihood and reaffirmed their pride in being hard workers (cf. Gomberg-Muñoz 2010).

They were different in terms of age, nationality, family circumstances, when and how they arrived in Belize, and their legal status in the country. These differences point to the significant complexity of their conditions in and experience of Belize City. Their primary commonality was their occupation, reflected by their mutual address as *chambeadores*. While they understood this as being a shared identity to a certain extent (cf. ch. 2), I focus here on their commonality as emerging through their social relationships, mediated by but not reducible to work.

Some of these men were connected not only because they were, or had been, working together. They were also helping each other to find job opportunities. For instance, they introduced each other to Juan, the contractor. Amadeo had introduced Emilio to him, Carlos had brought Javier to him, and Javier in turn brought Pedro to meet him. In some cases, and to a certain extent, residential proximity was also relevant for the development of these ties. For instance, the husband of Jaime's landlady (when he was at first living near Emilio and William), introduced Jaime to Juan, and Jaime introduced Juan to his son Marvin. Some of these ties were important for finding employment upon arrival in Belize City and they could turn into enduring relationships that stretched back years.

Apart from finding suitable employers, these friends also cooperated to provide for each other in times when the contractor had a scarcity of jobs.

⁷⁶ In Portuguese, *chambão* seems to retain the association both with cheap meat and rudeness. Dictionaries over the years report similar meanings: *chambão* 'rude' (Bluteau 1712); *chambão*, *chambam* 'inferior quality beef meat', and figuratively 'clumsy and rude person' (*Diccionario Da Lingua Portuguesa* 1914, 190); *chambao* 'bad quality meat', 'ham', 'haggard', 'poorly dressed' (Oliveira 1972).

This usually meant that those more experienced in and knowledgeable about Belize City and construction work, took the younger or less experienced with them. The former group was also more skilled than the latter because of their longer occupational history in the sector. These relations functioned as informal apprenticeships and, beyond the transmission of certain kinds of knowledge, were important for gaining access to the construction sector (as the older men served as gate-keepers) and were at times long-lasting (Coy 1989, 10). For instance, William took Marvin to work with him for other contractors, and Carlos called Javier to help him cleaning yards. The relation between skilled workers and helpers on the worksite, with the sharing of knowledge about different aspects of construction, was to a certain extent mirrored in the provision of information and contacts, or knowledge about employment. Those who had more experience in the industry inevitably had more contacts, and thus more access to employment opportunities (cf. Buechler 1989, 45; Marchand 2009, 21, 222). In a context where work recruitment was informal, building strong personal relationships was crucial in order to secure employment and further expand one's knowledge of other workers and contractors. Thus, workers were dependent on each other in order to find work opportunities.

Sociability was integral to these flows of information. When socializing, information circulated faster because it was shared via the group, as seen in the birthday party, compared to one to one meetings. Getting together was an occasion to share information about working opportunities, but also to comment on contractors' and colleagues' behaviour. These commentaries reinforced ties, and therefore the formation of shared knowledge and opinions about different aspects of work (see McFeat 1974, 6–9 for a discussion of the importance of frequency, duration and proximity in group formation). What was happening during the day on construction sites was commented upon in yards during the evening. In the anthropological and sociological literature on construction workers, there is often mention of socializing beyond work-time (e.g. Marchand 2009, 235) and drinking between builders (e.g. Moore 2013, 64). In particular, according to Thiel

(2012, 91–92), the mobile nature of the industry in Britain, the absence of a common stable worksite, and the past environmental conditions of cold climate and polluted water, historically contributed to the centrality of pubs and beer to builders' lives. The pub is also a place where employment is both offered and found. In the context of the fluid employment conditions in the USA, Applebaum also noted the occupational advantages of frequenting bars where other journeymen congregate (1999, 102–3).

However, this literature focuses on work and exchanges between workers on the building site, making only passing mention to the worker's social interactions beyond the workplace⁷⁷. I argue that as much as sociality plays a role on the worksite (cf. ch. 5), interactions beyond the workplace are equally important and have a bearing upon work itself (cf. Popp and Swora 2001, also as an exception to alcohol-related socializing). Since relations were constituted as much on the worksite as outside of it, their nature emerges most clearly by looking at the articulation between work and leisure rather than focusing on one or the other. For Lefebvre, leisure and work cannot be separated; after the 'work is over, when resting or relaxing or occupying himself in his own particular way, a man is still the same man.' (Lefebvre 2008, 30) Moreover, while these workers were looking for '*distraction, entertainment and repose*' (Ibid. 33), leisure did not appear to 'break with the everyday [...] not only as far as work is concerned, but also for day-to-day family life.' (Ibid. 33) If work and non-work time were understood as different by my interlocutors, there were also not diametrically opposed.

Thus, to look at sociality through both work and leisure as a part of a continuum reveals aspects of both. The personal nature of relationships and their hierarchical aspects related to work emerge also in the sociability

⁷⁷ Gill's (2001) work on day labourers in Japan is an exception, as he exclusively did fieldwork outside the workplace. The older ethnographic work of Lemasters (1976), mainly among construction workers, has no focus on construction work itself and is limited to conversations taking place in a bar. In short, there is a tendency in focusing either only on the worksite or outside of it.

between men when they are not working. Javier's decision not to call the contractor can be understood as aimed towards the creation of a more horizontal atmosphere during his son's celebrations. Without their employer present, the men were free to openly discuss work opportunities or even criticise the contractor himself. Moreover, on this specific occasion Javier surrounded himself by his peers, creating an environment different from the usual after-work sociability.

In fact, it was common for Juan to buy a round of drinks and invite his workers to relax in his yard on the weekends. During these recreational occasions, the discussion informally touched upon work and non-work-related issues, and the workers were usually grateful because the contractor was acting as patron. This form of sociability resulted in a closer bond between the contractor and his workers, partially instrumental in forming trust relationships and a non-conflictual working environment (cf. ch. 2). Not all the experiences with contractors were of the same kind, as exemplified for instance by Emilio's anecdotes about bosses seemingly inviting workers for a drink and subtracting the bill from their wages at the end of the night. It is worth mentioning that in the case of Juan, people seemed to genuinely enjoy his company, as previous employees, friends and neighbours frequently stopped by to share a drink, have a chat or to watch television together. However, the possibility of talking freely was appreciated during the contractor's absence on occasions like the birthday party, a casual drink in one of the worker's yard, a stroll after the Sunday mass or a gathering in the park. Indeed, apart from drinking together, these workers also engaged in other forms of sociality with their respective families. Thus, while alcohol consumption was an important aspect of sociality between the men, it was not essential for maintaining good relations. For instance, after Marvin started his relationship with Emilio's partner's daughter, he also began to attend her evangelical church. He stopped drinking, and was perhaps less

present in after-work get-togethers, but he continued to have good relations with his workmates.⁷⁸

Notably, they all were or had been working for the same contractor. I mentioned the relevance of sociability between workers and contractor earlier, and I expand upon this in chapter 5. This contributed to the active building of relationships beyond the dyadic ties of worker-contractor (or a more complex sequence made up of contractor-tradesman-helper). These men related to each other by working or having been working for the same employer: they either met the contractor through each other, or met each other whilst working for him. Thus, by being connected to their employer, even when the contractor was absent (as for instance during the birthday party described earlier), they established enduring relationships beyond one-to-one hiring arrangements. These relationships were thus more enduring and beneficial in terms of constancy of work than the dyadic ties of day labourers with contractors (and skilled workers). These relationships differed from the spatially dispersed and temporally contingent relations established by day labourers, in the sense of being manifested in and reinforced through group sociality.

Relations between these *cuates* and *chambeadores* were instrumental in finding employment opportunities within the fluid conditions of the industry. Relations in the workplace were mutually reinforced during leisure time, both between workers and with contractors. Differences in skilled knowledge relating to a particular trade or relevant to a particular project corresponded to varying knowledge of the industry at large and resulted in more experienced workers supporting those who were newly arrived to Belize, less

⁷⁸ Buying rounds of beer or chipping in money for a shared bottle of rum was important, as well as being offered rum by the contractor after work. Workers also frequented bars, although with this particular group of workers I would usually drink in houses or yards. These drinks, the context of their consumption and its social significance cannot be conflated under a generalized rubric of drinking (Van Wolputte and Fumanti 2010). Thus, while I do not focus on alcohol consumption analytically, I account for its social significance by describing different contexts in which drinking takes place through the ethnography in this chapter and the next (see T. M. Wilson 2015 for a review anthropological works of drinking).

knowledgeable and looking for employment. However, these relationships are overlooked in a perspective only concerned with work and workplace sociality. They are nonetheless important for younger workers recently arrived in Belize City, creating ties that are economically and emotionally valuable in the lives of these men. Emilio's support to Amadeo, William's pride in Marvin, Marvin's remarks about 'moral support' and the possible reasons for his absence, indicate that these relationships cannot be strictly reduced to work alone. Thus, working relationships and amicable ties cannot be reduced to one another. Rather, as leisure and work are intermeshed, frictions and sympathies permeate these relations and are expressed in shared moments of sociality.

4.4 A family plan

Upon Javier's arrival in Belize City, he entered the labour market as a builder and started to establish relationships related to his work. He gradually expanded his circle of friends which, as seen in the previous section, was pivotal in making a living. These relationships, evolving over time, intersected with his personal and familial migratory trajectories. In moving to Belize, he and Alejandra loosened some kin ties with the prospect of reinforcing others in the future in the USA. In the meantime, they formed a household in Belize, taking their sons and daughter to live with them, and later bringing Alejandra's mother and brother. Their move was thus characterized by three concerns: (1) creating relationships in Belize City, (2) negotiating kin relations in Honduras, Belize and the United States, and (3) constituting a household from Honduras to Belize. The aspects concerning the first point were focus of the preceding section. In this section, I begin to shed light on how the latter two aspects operated. In doing so, I explore the 'core' of their family (the nuclear family) in terms of its relationship with their kin at large. Javier and Alejandra understood themselves as a couple and their children as the mobile unit on which their everyday efforts and longer-term plans were focused. It is in this sense that I distinguish core family from other relatives. Nonetheless, while recognising this distinction,

I show how the ways in which they navigated their concerns with their core family and broader kin connect these two aspects in practice.

Javier's mother had been living in the USA (along with some other members of his family) since he was nine. For Javier, Belize was a stage in the family's journey to their destination in the USA, and to a reunion with his mother. The only other close kin of Javier⁷⁹, his three brothers from his mother's side, were in Honduras. One of them was pressing Javier to send remittances. Alejandra bitterly commented:

But I paid rent, electricity, and water in Honduras. Not the school for my sons because it was free, but the school for my daughter yes, because it was private. They never paid their rent [because they used to live with their grandmother], and now they understand what it means to live, like, normally. And they ask us for money, but I also have to pay rent, food, electricity, water and school for my children!

It has been noted that remittances from Central Americans in Belize are 'minimal and uncommon' (Acuña González 2012, 49), probably because the parents, children or spouses of migrant workers often reside in Belize with them. Another factor is Belize's higher cost of living compared with other Central American countries (Ibid.). This was significant for Javier, who complained to his wife that she should stop mentally converting the price of commodities from Belizean Dollars to Lempiras (the Honduran currency). This made everything seem overpriced and turned shopping a frustrating exercise.

My interlocutors reflected these tendencies and understood remittances as concerning close family. For instance, Jaime sent remittances to his daughter

⁷⁹ Javier had two brothers and a sister from his father's side, with whom he was not close. Alejandra knew about a brother in the USA, but she did not have a personal relationship with him.

in Honduras, while his son Marvin sent money to his mother (Jaime's ex-wife). Jaime still contributed to the mortgage payments for their house in Honduras, even though they were separated (cf. § 6.1). They were also hoping that Jaime's daughter would reach them in Belize. Javier's mother also sent remittances to him when he was younger, in the hope that he would study and have a better life. Carlos and Amadeo both lived with spouses and children in Belize, while Emilio and William arrived in Belize as adolescents, their families were in Belize, and they had had little or no contact with their home countries for a long time. More generally, close family relations helped to ground these men in a country in which they were not born. For instance, Jaime's relationship with a South American woman, was for him part of his settling in Belize City, a process which he saw as opening up new opportunities in life (see ch. 6). Amadeo felt a strong connection to El Salvador, while he saw his children as tied to Belize: 'I'm no[t Belizean], I'll always be blue [El Salvador national team colour], but my children yes, they are.' (*'Yo no, siempre voy a ser azul, pero mis hijos sí, ellos sí.'*) Emilio felt 'neither from here, nor from there' (*'no soy ni de aquí, ni de allá'*), but suggested that all he had in Belize were his children and grandchildren. Thus, beyond these men's length of stay in the country and legal situation within it, their bonds with the place were influenced by the intergenerational relations within their close family.

Remittances were only one of the means by which to maintain contact with home countries and varied according to the sender's gender and permanence in Belize (cf. Cohen 2011; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Fouratt 2017, 795; Winters 2009, 13). However, in spite of these different approaches to remittances, they suggest an understanding of the migration process that focuses more on family relations (encompassing those left behind as much as those born in Belize) rather than individual projects (cf. Fouratt 2017; Izcara Palacios and Andrade Rubio 2014). Javier and Alejandra's choice not to send remittances also suggests the willingness to loosen these relationships in view of a progressive family consolidation in Belize City, and their future reunification with Javier's mother in the USA.

Their plan was therefore not intended to be a sojourn with an eventual return to their home country (cf. Chavez 1988), nor a final destination (cf. T. Wilson 1994). Rather than a quick stopover, Belize constituted a phase in their plan.

Before I could grasp the complexity of Javier's plan, I was surprised by his efforts to create a comfortable dwelling, as it did not make financial sense: why would he spend money (and time) here instead of saving for his eventual move to the USA?

He remodelled part of the flat where he was living, building a wall that allowed for an extra room, and was proud of its condition. Once I was invited on a Sunday to enjoy a 'Honduran lunch' with him. He looked at his flat: 'We have a good house, two televisions, furniture, a laptop. It's not bad for a year and a half, is it? [...] Also, I want to buy some kitchen furniture, a table other than this one made of plastic.' Javier's house not only hosted those leisure moments with *cuates* and *chambeadores* and family, but it was remodelled thanks to his own skills and occasionally using material from the worksite. To borrow again from Lefebvre, for the craftsmen 'productive labour was merged with everyday life' (Lefebvre 2008, 30). The physical structure of the house merged work and non-work, as it demonstrated his skills (and incorporated materials from the worksite), was a tangible sign of success achieved by working, as well as brought his family and friends/co-workers together in one place. His efforts to secure a comfortable dwelling make sense and reinforce the idea that Belize did not constitute a quick stop in Javier's long-term plan. However, there was more to the way in which Javier showed me around his dwelling. His pride in their material comforts was also the satisfaction of having been able to secure a good standard of living for his family in a foreign country, being able to provide for them in the same ways he was once able to do in Honduras. Through showing me these objects, Javier was assessing and communicating his successful process of self-improvement, or betterment, the latter suggesting 'a flexible space of interpretation that enables migrants to (re)assess their lives and

achievements in the light of the different conditions of life in which they find themselves.’ (Olwig 2011, 42)

Talking about his house (*casa*), Javier was thus pointing at the success in making home (*hogar*), or rather making a better home for his family (cf. Datta 2008). I am not conflating house and home, rather suggesting that by putting effort into his house, Javier manifested his success at making a home in Belize City. Javier’s experience can be characterized by fluidity and motion: rather than fixed in place, his home – the place ‘where one best knows himself’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998, 9) – was an outcome of his ability to contribute to his family’s wellbeing. This was signalled by his pride in his achievements in terms of renovating and furnishing the house where they could live comfortably (see Hauschild 2001; Williksen and Rapport 2010 for wider considerations on ‘home’).

Javier and Alejandra were proud and satisfied with their achievement in spite of the problems they encountered, and as much as they were critical of the challenges of living, working and raising their children in Belize City. While Belize City was only one stage in their plan, their striving for a future destination, their concern for their family’s wellbeing and separation from Honduras resulted in an ability to realise their goal for a better life in the present (with their future still in mind). Thus, while temporary, though not ephemeral, Javier and Alejandra’s conditions in Belize City did not prevent them from searching for and obtaining what they judged as betterment in the present of their family’s plan-in-the-making (cf. Stodolska and Santos 2006, 635). Their subjective sense of present well-being (and aspirations for the future) was understood as a family situation (cf. Grønseth 2013, 13; Izcara Palacios and Andrade Rubio 2014, 102). I mean to show that not only did they talk of their plan in collective terms, but also their understanding of their experience, with its challenges and satisfactions, relied on the idea that these are situated in the meaningful ties between members of the (core) family.

For Javier and Alejandra, the focus both on their past and future moves and of the efforts in their present was placed on what I call their core family. While kin at large were prominent in terms of moving (leaving, settling, and re-joining), foregrounding their core family in narratives reveals the point from which they actively navigated relations with other relatives.

They reconstituted the household flexibly as they moved over time. After they reunited their core family, they welcomed Alejandra's mother into their house. This was emotionally significant for both women, and for the children. Alejandra's mother was also central in helping with chores, as Alejandra and Javier were often too busy because of their work. Pedro's intermittent inclusion in the household was equally emotionally significant, and they supported him not least by providing connections for potential work opportunities. These additions to their cohabiting nuclear family can be rightly seen from the perspective of their economic and emotional wellbeing, reproduction of migratory patterns, and creation of a homely environment. However, I do not mean to shift my analytical focus to the household (cf. Horevitz 2009, 751–52). I do not focus analytically on the kind of household of which Javier and Alejandra were part (Bender 1967). Nor do I separate 'family' from 'household'. Yanagisako (2015) has noted that this is a shaky distinction in logical and empirical terms: household is not applied to residential units of individuals lacking genealogical links but is applied to families composed by individuals shifting between households in different continents ('transnational households'); and household is used for groups sharing a living space and 'domestic' activities, the latter also being the functional grounds of the family. Thus, I follow Yanagisako (Ibid.), who besides terminological discussion, calls for ethnographic precision. Therefore, it is clear from this chapter's discussion that Javier and Alejandra understood their migratory plan as being focused on their 'core' family, while themselves being part of families in a wider sense, and adopting changing residential arrangements. I show how Alejandra's mother and brother were flexible insertions into the 'family plan' at particular moments in time when they came to cohabit together, and their presence cannot be reduced to

either economic or emotional factors. Similarly, Javier and Alejandra handled relationships with kin outside Belize with some ambivalence (not least because of financial reasons): they distanced themselves from Javier's brothers, but welcomed Alejandra's mother and brother. Their envisaged future in the USA was related to the presence of Javier's mother in that country. She could have helped, and they would finally re-join after years. Thus, family left behind, taken on board for a segment of journey, and ideally reunited. Yet, Javier's core family remained constant throughout these shifts. What emerges from Javier and Alejandra's accounts is that their relationships with more distant relatives were important but nonetheless did not change their focal preoccupations surrounding their envisaged trajectory in-the-making.

Moving for them was a collective effort focused on this unit. They moved to Belize firstly as a couple, then brought their children with them. Their success in Belize was based on the ways they could provide comfort to themselves and their children. Even if these movements were not simultaneous, their overall scope was collective. Their planned movement to the USA was gradual, with their daughter as the first to leave. The entanglement of these plans for the future and the hindrances which Javier's family faced in the present day are the object of the next section.

4.5 *El inglés y los papeles*. Present challenges and future plans

Javier's daughter's possible enrolment in higher education in the US was seen as the family's entry point to the country. She was already sixteen years old during my fieldwork, which gives some measure of the transitory nature of the family's stay in Belize. Therefore, schooling was a focus in Javier's plan. Javier's efforts in this direction were reminiscent of the efforts made by his mother when he was at school age. Javier talked with dissatisfaction and resentment about his education, stressing that he had wasted his mother's efforts of providing him with better possibilities: he

dropped out of school early and only later in life took evening classes in a technical school. Javier's daughter was sent to a private school in Honduras, and she was taking extra English classes in Belize in order to reach a level sufficient to be accepted as a university student in the USA. As she should have led the family's move to the USA, leaving first, the couple had 'invested' in her education since the time they lived in Honduras: 'She cost me a lot, you know, because of the English!' Javier pointed out once.

Being an English-speaking country, Belize had seemed to them to offer good possibilities for their daughter's (and sons') education. Already dissatisfied with the level of English taught in Honduras (one of the reasons for them to pay for private education for their daughter), they were disappointed by the fact that Kriol, and not English, was the most spoken language in Belize.

He speaks Kriol [*Criollo*]! [pointing at the oldest son] It is with the English that he has more problems. At school, they talk to them in Kriol! The younger reads a lot [in English], he likes it! But my daughter has a hard time learning. She tells me: 'Mam, I'm confused!'. Because at school they require a good English and on the streets Kriol is spoken. She goes to remedial classes, but they only give her stuff to read and they ask her to write down what she has understood! How is it possible to learn this way! [with a disappointed tone]

There were schools, like the one attended by Alejandra's employers' older children, where pupils were taught 'pure American English and they learn it!', but 'it's expensive', as Alejandra remarked. Their sons had Spanish-speaking friends with whom they used to spend time around the house, communicating in Spanish. At the same time, they would speak to their schoolmates mostly in Kriol, which they picked up quickly. Once, when the older son played music from his phone and sang popular Jamaican dancehall songs, Javier commented with irony: 'This one is a pure Belizean! Play a bachata, a ranchera! (*Éste es puro Beliceño! ¡Pone una bachata, una*

ranchera!'), only to get a joking response in English: 'No! I'm Belizean!'. While the two boys were quickly getting accustomed to life in Belize, for their parents, their language proficiency was also part of the longer-term plan to reach the United States. However, given that the most common language in Belize is Kriol, and not English, and partly because of their financial situation, their advancement was not as speedy as they had wished. Javier and Alejandra conditions would have improved in Belize, they believed, if they had made progress with their language. This was however also a preliminary step in preparation for the next move to the USA.

Alejandra and Javier were frustrated because neither of their working environments facilitated learning English. 'And you, since you know many languages, what advice can you give us as to learn English?', was one of the ways in which they repeatedly voiced their concerns to me, as they knew that I could speak a few languages and maybe had tips to share. Alejandra could understand English but not speak it. In her first job, the Hispanic lady who operated the food stall had the most interactions with customers, leaving Alejandra with minimal verbal exchanges. Currently, one of her employers was a Spanish speaker from Nicaragua, and she could grasp some English only when he spoke with his Belizean wife, while for the rest of the time she looked after a toddler. She had experienced discrimination for not being able to speak English (cf. Acuña González 2012, 46). For instance, she recalled that she was once admitted to the emergency service at the hospital, and a nurse commented that she should not be in Belize if she could not speak English.

Javier was also exposed to Spanish while working, since the contractor addressed him in Spanish, and his colleagues were Spanish speakers. The constraints that this created, were particularly evident to me while working, as I found myself surrounded by relatively recently arrived workers (such as Javier). Being the only bilingual, I was consulted by the owners who contracted Juan since they could not establish a successful communication. 'So good we have José who also knows English!', Javier used to comment

with a smile. Arguably, at last for Javier, sociability, though beneficial for work opportunities, further exacerbated the linguistic divide (more on this in the next section): Javier friends and workmates were Spanish speakers. Therefore, his work and leisure time, as during the birthday party, was more in Spanish rather than English.

Their poor language proficiency, as they recognized, contributed to their integration into the labour force in a way that invalidated their education and skills (cf. Acuña González 2012, 70) and limited, at least temporarily, their ability for social mobility. 'I'm a cable technician' Javier constantly said to me, 'I would like to work as a cable technician, it's a well-paid job...the problem is the English.' Learning English would have meant being able to deal directly with customers, rather than relying on a contractor, and enhancing his chances of finding a more rewarding job consistent with his previous experiences in Honduras.

Thus, Javier and Alejandra's preoccupations with language were twofold. On the one hand, the preoccupations were related to their stay in Belize and improving their immediate situation. On the other, they were instrumental in their long-term migratory plan. This intertwinement of everyday preoccupations and future orientation also emerges from their legal status in the country as a present and future concern.

On the day Javier invited me for lunch, after he happily showed me his house, his satisfied smile disappeared and his voice took on a worried tone: 'Now I only need to get the papers [*los papeles*] ...'. They genuinely wanted to regularize their condition in Belize, and Javier mentioned the issue from time to time. He noted that 'with the nationality from here it would be easier to reach the [United] States. Because with the Honduran passport we can travel in Central America, but not to Mexico. With the Belizean passport, you can reach as far as the [US] border with Mexico!'

Javier and his family entered Belize legally with tourist visas, but this was only a temporary (and expensive) solution. Indeed, after a few monthly visa renewals he was at the mercy of the immigration officer on duty on any given day, who could have decided to further query the sustained 'tourist' stay, or just issue another one-month stamp on his passport worth 100 Belizean Dollars. Javier could not apply for a work-visa⁸⁰ because the contractor was not willing to employ him on the books, and Javier had been told that permits were not available as a self-employed worker in accordance with his skills. Another option open to Javier and Alejandra would have been was to have another child, as children born in Belize would become Belizean citizens.⁸¹ Alejandra said: 'People tell me that I should get pregnant, to have a Belizean child and be able to stay here, because here they defend the mother and children. But no, many people do it, but three children are enough!'. She smiled to Javier who, smiling back, confirmed, 'Yes, three are enough!'. Their options were limited but they were committed to finding a viable solution.

The issue of their legal status in the country had immediate emotional and practical consequences. Becoming illegal would have meant living in constant fear of being stopped by the police, along with the possibility of being imprisoned. In fact, in Belize undocumented migration is treated as a criminal offence (UNHCR 2013; Global Detention Project 2016). Many Central Americans in Belize without papers shared with me their fear of police checks in Belize City. Likewise, moving within the country by bus exposed them, as I witnessed myself, to being searched and asked to show documents by the police. The police targeted potential foreigners by questioning mainly Hispanic-looking passengers (especially on the George

⁸⁰ In Belize, it is the employer that requests and pay for work permits needed to regularize the migrant position. Thus, such permits are employer-specific and the nature of the process (Acuña González 2012, 59–60), together with the fluctuating nature of employment in the industry, results in the unlikeliness of this avenue for regularization. Generally, the legislation is not specific about competencies and criterion, thus making it difficult to regularize one's stay on the grounds of occupation (Ibid. 68).

⁸¹ Belize Constitution, article 24, part III.

Price Highway that connects the Guatemalan border with the capital (Belmopan and Belize City). The possibility was frightening to the point that Javier's family, even with their tourist visa, was not exempt from it. For instance, when Alejandra recounted a family trip by boat to a cay near Belize City (another easily policed route), she reported the distress that she felt when 'they tell us that the police was going to check us. 'Uh!' I say...I was tense. But we didn't have problems, we have the stamp [visa on passport] and when they've asked what we were doing we just said "tourism", and they let us pass [smiles]. But who knows about the other people on the boat!'. De Genova (2002) has argued that policing exacerbates (undocumented) migrants' 'sense of ever-present vulnerability' (2002, 438), stressing how it is the 'palpable sense of deportability' ('the possibility of deportation') through which 'illegality' is lived (2002, 439). I suggest that there is also a sense of *imprisonability* which shapes the everyday spatialized vulnerability that migrants face and variously navigate in Belize City.

Thus, Alejandra and Javier's attempts to establish a relatively stable legal position in Belize were related to an immediate sense of insecurity. Legal, bureaucratic and work restrictions made it difficult for them to apply for work visas. Rather than being limited to their stay in Belize, Javier read their possible regularization in the country as enhancing their opportunities to move to, or get close to, the USA. Similarly, English proficiency was a necessity for their life in Belize and its achievement was challenged by their jobs and the unexpected Kriol vernacular of Belize City, but was also central to the education of their children in view of the future plan to move to the USA. English and visa, *el Inglés y los papeles*, were both salient aspects for their stay in Belize and for their movement North.

4.6 *Tranquilidad* and refuge in the city

So far, the relational aspects of migratory trajectories and settlement in Belize City have been emphasized, as well as the entanglement of present and future efforts and concerns. In this last section, I underscore ideas of

personal security and senses of vulnerability which are constitutive of the experience of leaving the home country and settling in Belize City. These aspects of the migratory experience contribute towards a more nuanced understanding of the previous discussion on work, sociability and kinship. They also provide a further viewpoint on how life in Belize City is experienced within a broader biographical context of inhabiting the urban space, a topic explored in the previous chapter (see also ch. 2).

Javier, as seen above, was preoccupied with his legal status in the country. As a last resort, he decided to apply for a refugee status, as Belize reopened its borders to asylum seekers after twenty years due to rising levels of insecurity in the neighbouring countries.⁸²

Indeed, Javier not only stressed the growing economic instability in Honduras, he had other more immediate concerns with regards to their life there. They had been asked for '*impuestos de guerra*' ('war tax'), a form of gang extortion, because of their small business, which has led to physical assault and death across Honduras (*La Nación* 2015). Therefore, 'things started to get a bit awful in the *colonia* (neighbourhood)', due to conflicts between *mareros* and drug traffickers ('*narcotraficantes!*', Javier's eldest son emphasized to me while listening to our conversation). This conflict led to tighter control of the neighbourhood by the traffickers, who 'privatized' the area ('*privatizaron la colonia*'). Checkpoints were established and 'guards' inspected anyone who was not a resident, demanding residents' financial

⁸² In Belize, the Refugee Eligibility Committee has not been active since 1997. In 2009 the Supreme Court ordered the Government of Belize to reactivate the Committee in order to process refugee claims, since the Government, by not accepting asylum seekers, was not conforming to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1991 Belize Refugee Act (revised in 2000) (UNHCR 2013). In 2015, The Eligibility Commission was revived. In 2016, the UNHCR started to work with its long-term partner, the NGO Help for Progress, in order to assist the Government in re-establishing a refugee programme (UNHCR 2017). In April 2016, I interviewed one of the three UNHCR personnel working in the country who stated that in each of the two days a week they were open to the public they received around four hundred people. In 2016, the estimated number of asylum seeker in the country were almost four thousand people (UNHCR 2017). At the beginning of 2018, the Ministry of Immigration approved the first fifteen asylum application since the 1990s (LoveFM 2018, see also 2017a, 2017b; and Lakhani 2017).

contributions for 'looking after' (*'cuidar'*) the territory. The situation escalated to the point that 'there were too many deaths', highlighted by cadavers left at the borders of their area.

Alejandra's friend who suggested they moved to Belize told her that in Belize 'it was quieter, there was work' (*'era más tranquilo, que había trabajo'*). They decided to take their children when they verified 'that yes it was quieter, [there was] neither...*mara* (gang) nor anything [threatening]'

Javier and Alejandra's trajectories challenge a standard view of Central America migration to Belize in purely economic terms. Central Americans arriving in Belize in the 1980s and early 1990s were looking for refuge from civil wars as well as hoping to make a living (Shoman 1990, 16). The common understanding in Belize is that migration from neighbouring countries after the 1990s is driven by economic reasons. Moreover, there has been little scholarly attention paid to immigration from Central American countries after the last decade of the twentieth century. A rise in murder rates, at times comparable to the years of civil wars (BBC 2015), and the new opening for Central American refugees in Belize (Fredrick 2017) contradict this understanding. Indeed, the testimony of recently arrived Central Americans like Alejandra and Javier with whom I talked in Belize City, show that concerns for safety and the growing violence in their countries of birth is a central reason for moving (or escaping) to Belize.

While concerns for their safety were evident in their life stories, these newly arrived migrants, especially from Honduras and El Salvador, nonetheless felt much safer in Belize City than in their home countries. In conversations with Central Americans in Belize City, they often emphasized positively that the city was quiet and relatively safe. For instance, while chatting and eating tacos from a food stall around seven in the evening, a Salvadoran lady explained why she liked to live in Belize City: '...well because here you can stay out from home at this time in the evening!' These opinions about the possibility of moving around the city without fear of violence contrast with

views of Belize City amongst its long-time residents (and of others from different parts of the country with whom I was occasionally able to talk while travelling). I show the significance of these perceptions in imagining different futures in chapter 6. Here I wish to stress that as much as Javier and Alejandra were happy and proud of being able to educate their children and sustain their family in Belize, they were equally satisfied for having found a 'quiet' (*'tranquilo'*) place to live. This was important for them and others like them, and should not to be overlooked.

It has been argued that migration in Central America escapes mutually exclusive migratory categories (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1991; for Belize see Moberg 1997, 138). In anthropology, the shortcomings of making sharp analytical distinctions between categories such as migrant or refugee (and their importance for theoretical comparison) have been made clear (Brettell 2015, 153–153). Javier and Alejandra's case, among others, shows that reasons to migrate are multiple, even when violence is an overriding factor in their accounts. This is not to deny the differential impact of their legal status granted by the Belizean state upon their experiences of migration, or their perceptions in the eyes of the Belizean population. Their experience emphasizes these conditions, at the same time revealing how they actively navigated legal and economic constraints and opportunities, rather than passively accepting these conditions and the categorizations that come with them. Bearing in mind the complex, overlapping perspectives that feature in narratives about migration helps us to understand the varieties of the migrants' experiences in Belize.

These experiences of living in the city also allow for a final note on how the urban space is perceived and inhabited. I have kept a focus on personal stories and relations as they unfolded (and were envisioned to unfold in the future), while stressing conditions peculiar to Belize and specifically Belize City.

Fear of police checks in the city gives rise to a sense of imprisonability, especially for migrants without papers, even as the sense of quietness means freedom from the fear of crime-related violence and a relative ease of mobility within the city. It is useful to juxtapose this experience of the city with the one described in chapter 2. There, the city was made up of economic opportunities related to contingent encounters and dependent on relationships established over the course of one's residence in the city. The knowledge of the urban space and history of relationships within it also meant possible threats to personal safety. These were related to the significance of certain relationships (and history of dwelling in specific areas) in terms of true or presumed affiliation with rival gangs distributed throughout the city. To understand these different perceptions of the city and the different forms of mobility associated with it, relationships made over one's lifetime return to be pivotal. For newly arrived migrants, the city is less dense in terms of relationships than for long-time dwellers. Central American migrants are partially limited by incidental encounters with the police but are free from spatially specific threats that they experienced in their places of origin. Long term Belize City dwellers navigate possible economic opportunities while being aware of risks related to a specific and subjectively organized topography. Considering these differences, it is easier to understand how for some living in Belize City is perceived as a quiet refuge, while for others it can be a threatening space.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the relationships that Javier and Alejandra established in Belize City. On the one hand, Javier built bonds with his co-workers and friends in the city. These relationships were central for mutual support, for finding job opportunities, acquiring knowledge of the construction market and sharing values related to work. On the other hand, Javier and his spouse managed relationships with kin between Honduras, Belize and the USA. These were central to the migratory plan, which was focused on the core family, and consisted in weakening kin ties in Honduras

with the hope of strengthening family bonds in the USA, and involved a flexible household composition in Belize by virtue of which Javier and Alejandra received and dispensed support.

I have shown the intertwinement of work and leisure time, and of present preoccupations and future concerns. Sociability involved friends, co-workers and family. Getting together constituted an occasion for recreation while also involving information flows that were pivotal for work in a context of informal labour relations. Present concerns with language and legal status in the country were impacted by the insertion into specific niches of the labour market, understood as crucial for gaining better living conditions, and central to realizing the family's plan of moving to the USA.

Thus, in looking at migrants' experiences, I emphasized the necessity of analysing the connection between work and leisure, and the interlocking of present and future expectations. In the following chapter, I continue to follow the workers encountered above, emphasizing the relationship between leisure and work within the worksite itself.

Chapter 5. The worksite

Following Javier and his friends, this chapter focuses on the workplace from the perspective of skilled workers and their helpers. The shift in ethnographic focus in the thesis from unskilled to skilled labour reflects the methodological trajectory of my fieldwork. Initially, I worked for different employers following Dylan's 'catch and kill' method. Later I was employed with more constancy by Juan, the contractor for whom Javier worked. Considering the methodological course of fieldwork, the chapter is ethnographically based mainly on regular interactions with a stable working crew of skilled and skilled-to-be workers, in contrast to my earlier brief working periods with unskilled labourers (described in chapter 2). Here, I return to exploring the workplace but from the point of view of more skilled workers who usually work together.

I look at the workplace as an 'activity space' (Meløe 1988), constituted by the activities that take place within it. These activities can only be successfully and accurately observed by (i.e. are intelligible to) those who are familiar with them. An activity space is conceptually delimited by the familiarity of its activities. Meløe, who coined the concept, notes that 'where we are poor observers, we are also poor agents.' (1988, 89) Meløe takes the example of the game of chess. A person who understands that moving a piece on the board corresponds to a threat to the opponent's piece, is familiar with the game and able to play it themselves. A person who understands the same movement in terms of distance measurable in centimetres, and angle measured in degrees, would not be able to play chess themselves. In the game of chess as an activity space, this person is a poor observer and agent. Thus, if observers within the activity space can take the place of agents, this means that they can also be skilled observers.

In Meløe's terms, a worker is a skilled observer of the activities carried out by other workers, whilst his own activities as an agent in action are observed successfully (in line with the activity space) by other workers with a critical

eye on his skills. His practical skills in turn allow him to make the workplace intelligible (cf. Overing 2003, 298). I show how the activity space within the construction site is made up of the act of labouring and other activities of which the workers have a mutual understanding⁸³. The idea of an activity space as an analytical lens for understanding the worksite allows us to account for the interrelation of the 'fluid' activities that take place within it, as well as the workers' relationships, evaluations and understandings based on the 'hard' physicality of their productive labour in construction. 'Space' in this analysis refers to the activities of workers rather than the physical three-dimensionality of the worksite. Thus, in applying the conceptual tool of 'activity space', I foreground the relational aspect of workers actions and their understanding of them, against the background of the physical and temporal character of the workplace per se. I show how skilled workers engage with the physical space of the worksite with a clear plan in mind, using their skills to effectively realize a project within the material and temporal constraints of the job.

I start this chapter with a description of a day at work in order to convey a sense of the simultaneity of actions and interactions that characterize the work site. In the analysis that follows, I unfold the time-space of the construction site as a scene of polyactivity. Thus, the activity space can be conceptualized as having the quality of containing diverse kinds of activities, all of which become intelligible when understood in terms of their connections. I show how this scene involves a diverse group of workers as they negotiate and assert values based on personal qualities. These values, played out relationally, are (partially) forged and expressed during the productive process observable on the work site. Following this, I analyse the fluid movements and adjustments involved in the assigning of different tasks. This flexibility is necessary because workplaces change, and workers contribute, through building, to the constant alteration of the 'hard' contours

⁸³ I was also part of this activity space as an observer and an actor. Therefore, my understanding of the activities is related to my positionality within it (which I occasionally make explicit in the discussion). My understanding was at once enhanced by working alongside these men, and limited by my restricted knowledge when compared with theirs.

of the physical space over time even on the same site. The organization of labour corresponds to the physicality of the working space, while following a trade-based hierarchy in which status is related to skill acquisition. Labouring and giving instructions take place with regards to both this hierarchy and the relative autonomy of workers.

By manipulating the rhythms of their labour and coordinating rest times, workers exercise this autonomy in a tactical manner (de Certeau 1984). When tasks are particularly interdependent, workers not only collectively organize their working time, but also their breaks. Time is also pivotal for worker's understanding of the building process. Time impacts the quality of the very 'hard' contours of the working space. Indeed, workers are producers of the physicality of the space where they work. They perceive physical structures according to their activities within the activity space (Meløe 1988, 95). Therefore, products of labour are perceived as evidence of one's skills, on which status is based. Thus, as they observe each other according to skill, builders evaluate their activities as well as the resulting products of labour as signs of each other's abilities and hard work. They acquire further status based on these observations. On one hand, status is pivotal for their relations with contractors. On the other, respect earned in the worksite is the basis of a hierarchy operating within it according to non-authoritarian principles.

The spatiotemporal experience of the workplace is impacted not only by materials and building schedule, but also by the positioning of subjects in mediating and asserting their skills and autonomy. Alongside honesty about one's capabilities and working hard, builders also positively value 'willingness' to learn and work, and bravado in climbing high structures as scaffoldings or buildings under construction. I show how these last elements are pivotal in the on-site appraisal of helpers who are in the process of learning a trade. Helpers' activities -which modify the physicality of the construction site- are pivotal in an assessment of their progress and are one of the means by which workers also work together to make the activity space

into a learning space. Skilled workers thus observe the activities of helpers, who acquire a trained eye to observe the work of others even as they are being closely observed themselves.

As we have seen, the notion of activity space is useful as it delimits actions based on mutual intelligibility, while expanding the analysis beyond labouring alone. This perspective allows us to account for other activities, seemingly less congruous with work: comedic exchanges. A superficial analysis might ignore such exchanges within the activity space as behaviour not encompassed by observation pertinent to labouring activities. However, comic exchanges impact the activity space by creating commonalities, reinforcing differences and tactically challenging authority. Comic exchanges take place throughout the working day, allowing for workers to comment on each other and their bosses, thus contributing to perceptions of the activity space. The chapter concludes by exploring the relationship between workers and their contractor. This relationship pervades the site and, as in the case of relationships between workers, extends beyond it (cf. 4.3).

Rather than focusing on the organizational aspects of work per se, I give an ethnographic exploration of how movement, coordination, labouring and rest time, comic exchange, and personal relationships within the activity space are meaningful for workers in accordance with their experience of working in construction. Looking at common understandings of their experiences amongst workers reveals tensions between autonomy and reliance, as much as between verticality and horizontality in hierarchical terms. The activity space is analytically useful as it allows for a unitary account of the experience of working on site. It permits us to separate activities while referring to a single activity space. Thus, rather than isolating the workplace, this perspective reveals the interrelated nature of a number of distinct activities. Finally, the concept allows us to stress how workers share many things in common (e.g. understanding and use of time, recognition of common values, recognition of mutual autonomy) based on their activities as

producers on site despite their differences (in skills, age, ethnicity, hierarchy): they are all construction workers.

5.1 At the restaurant...working

It is Sunday, twenty to eight in the morning, and Belize City is still asleep. I am waiting at the entrance of a restaurant that we have been renovating since yesterday when I see Juan, the contractor, driving his pickup truck loaded with Javier, Pedro, Emilio, William, Matthew and Arturo -a Guatemalan in his twenties who has not worked for Juan before. While some of them eat breakfast, Juan sends me up the two-storey scaffolding to paint the beams that support the roof from top to bottom. These intersect with horizontal wooden boards attached to the metal roof panels. After the structure was given a base coat of white paint, it is now ready to receive a second multi-coloured layer to complete the transformation from bare wood to a rainbow-like effect contrasting with the white panels.

Javier, Pedro and Arturo paint on small ladders or standing on the balustrade surrounding three-quarters of the restaurant's rectangular plan. Within its perimeter, plasterboard walls separate the kitchen from the dining space. After a while John, an old acquaintance of Juan in his mid-thirties, arrives. He is accompanied by one of his younger male friends and neighbours, whom the contractor addresses as Lee Bwoy⁸⁴. John paints with an extendable roller, and his friend and I assemble some smaller scaffolding and join it to the section on which I had been working. We climb up and start painting alongside each other, moving the structure along as we progress with the work, occasionally

⁸⁴ 'Little boy': general term used to refer to younger males instead of the more equal 'man'. I had been myself addressed as such by other skilled workers in other occasions. Perhaps with irony, since his age, Juan referred at times to Jaime as 'Old Bwoy'.

painting some horizontal beams that are still in need of their first white coat. We coordinate in silence for the most part. I suspect that he is quiet because he is suspicious of my identity, even though I had introduced myself. The day before, he and John were trying to understand if I was a fugitive from justice or a Central American migrant; 'da who dat?...maybe ih com tru di back...me no deal wit dem Panya...'85.

During the morning, Mr. Juan leaves the site and the workers take a few five-minutes breaks, sitting, smoking a cigarette, drinking water or having a chat. Around mid-morning, John and Lee Bway smoke a spliff and Javier approaches me, showing me a cold bottle of 'rum bitter'⁸⁶. 'This is what I was talking about yesterday!', he tells me, 'You have to have a woman close by if you drink this!' he warns me smiling and joins the other workers inside the kitchen where Matthew, Emilio and William had been tiling. Matthew invites me and, putting his finger to his lips, warns me in a complicit tone not to 'tell *Don Juan!*'. Emilio serves me a glass, and we joke on the aphrodisiac properties of the liquor: he suggests I have a woman close by if I drink it because of its beneficial *calentura* (fever/arousal), that is also believed to keep you working.

Someone sees Mr. Juan at the beginning of the hallway that leads to the premises, and everyone promptly starts to work again. The sun is reaching its zenith and working in the shade would seem like a blessing, if it was not for the considerable rise in temperature under the roof. Mr. Juan leaves again and returns around one o'clock carrying polystyrene food boxes containing the

⁸⁵ 'who's that?... he came through the back [i.e. entered the country illegally] ...I don't deal with Spaniards [Hispanics/Central Americans]'

⁸⁶ Herb-infused rum-based liquor (lighter in alcohol than white or dark rum) (Fig. 12).

lunch: stew pork, rice and beans, large flour tortillas and potato salad.

I sit with the 'Panish'⁸⁷ workers who, as a joke, put me to the test by offering me a hot chilli to bite. I am fond of hot food so I accept, and in turn offer what is left of it to some others who refuse. John asks Mr. Juan for food for him and his friend (even if the day before they provided for themselves), who explains: 'Ah mi tink unu no laik Panish food.'⁸⁸ ⁸⁹ The two postpone the break and eat on their own later, as they did the previous day.

When the hour lunch break is over, Matthew returns to cut tiles outside the kitchen and transport them inside, where Jaime and his son Marvin join him. Jaime does electrical work, while Marvin assists in tiling. Once Jaime finishes his assigned task, he comes to paint the part of the roof above the entrance. In the dining area, the painters often switch roles so as to change posture (thereby resting some muscles and using others), and wait for the fresh white base coat to dry before moving ahead with the coats of colour.

John and his friend sing Jamaican dancehall songs played over a speaker connected to their phones, so the afternoon starts to resemble the soundscape of the rest of the city—filled with the 'vibes' produced by hundreds of speakers in houses and yards, as people awaken from the torpor that follows the Sunday meal.

⁸⁷ See the Introduction for the ethnic/racial terms used in Belize. Here I use the Belizean term (S)Panish so as to distinguish the workers of Central American/Hispanic origins from the black/Afro-Belizeans (John and Lee Bwoy).

⁸⁸ 'I thought you didn't like Spanish food.'

⁸⁹ It was considered Spanish food probably because it was cooked by a Guatemalan person (one the workers' partner who owned a fast food restaurant). Although the dish did not substantially differ from a common Belizean meal, the doubling of carbohydrates (rice *plus* tortilla) is an element Belizeans ascribe to 'Panish' gastronomic habits (see Wilk 2006, 119).

The foreign-Belizean couple who owns the premises appears complaining that the tiling work should have been finished by noon today, since they need to put utensils and appliances in the kitchen and test them before re-opening to customers tomorrow⁹⁰. When we are left on our own again, I see John sipping beer from a plastic glass, he smiles: 'Ah no di play! Ah waahn finish dis an be fucked up!'⁹¹ and offers me a glass which he swipes from the bar. Soon all the workers have a beer, some more than one.

Jaime leaves in the late afternoon to start his shift as a watchman, and around six o'clock Pedro follows him since he works in the weekdays as a mechanic in a garage.

We have dinner with some *pupusas*⁹², except for John and his friend who continue to paint and later pick up some of the waste from the kitchen work with shovels and take it away. Before they both leave, John turns to me: 'Gimme a lee white Joseph. I'm leaving now, I have fi work tomorrow. I have my own ting too'⁹³, referring to his job as a self-employed welder.

Someone turns on a small speaker connected to a memory card and plays *reggaetón*, accommodating the tastes of the remaining workers. Indeed, the day before Lee Bwoy assertively and ironically answered that 'Di speaker kyaant play Panish music, ih no di work wit dat!'⁹⁴, to those who asked him for a change of

⁹⁰ This business' clientele were mostly cruise ship tourists, usually in the city during the weekdays rather than in weekends.

⁹¹ 'I don't play, I want to finish [this job] and be fucked up [i.e. drunk]!'

⁹² Stuffed Salvadorian tortillas.

⁹³ 'Give me a little cigarette Joseph. I'm leaving now, I have to work tomorrow, I also have my own thing.'

⁹⁴ 'The speaker can't play Spanish music, it doesn't work with that [kind of music]!'

playlist. However, Pedro changes genre from an interminable Bob Marley, Bob Marley covers, Bob Marley compilations... I wonder at how reggae music knows no ethnic boundaries.

Arturo, Javier and I climb the bigger scaffolding in order to finish the painting job. Once the daylight (and day-heat) fades we assemble lamps to illuminate the surroundings. Around eleven everyone is tired, and we sit around the small scaffolding, on the restaurant's parapet, or on wooden benches. Javier tries without success to call Mr. Juan to ask him for instructions. 'Aaahhhha!', we hear the contractor as he approaches, finding all of us resting. He instructs everybody to start cleaning and gather the tools. Arturo and I collect the paints and clean the new brushes that Juan bought yesterday after complaints that the wood was too rough for the ones he had had provided. Everyone, including Mr. Juan who cleans the bar, grabs a tool, a knife or a piece of metal and tries to scratch off the paint felt on the furniture and the floor. Then, we take turns at using a water-pressure gun brought by the contractor to clean the paint stains left on the wooden floor.

When Mr. Juan leaves, the restaurant's employees, who had arrived in the meantime to prepare for the following day's opening, ask us for help to transport a fridge inside the newly-paved kitchen. In exchange we ask for a beer, but the bartender soon realizes that the barrow is empty 'I've check dis ting dis [this thing this] morning and was half, Ah [I] want to know how the fuck it got empty!', he says to himself, so we play ignorant and ask for a coke instead. The tiling job is not dried yet and one of the tiles breaks under the weight of the utensils.

Around midnight, a couple of workers are still putting the last touches to the kitchen, and I am taken home with the remaining builders.



Figure 10 Painting work

5.2 Movement on the site

The work site is constituted by both the 'hard' physical contours of the space where work takes place, and the 'fluid' actions and interactions between the people who work or move within it. Information, organization of work and labouring 'are mediated by the materiality of the building and the space of the site' (Lyon 2013, 28). One of the characteristics of the construction industry, its intrinsically transient nature, means that workplaces change constantly⁹⁵. Work, and consequently movement, follow a similar pattern across worksites even as they adapt to each particular site. Thus, while worksites change in their physicality and working crews, they can be conceptualized as activity space. Different 'hard' contours accommodate fluid movements based on the same intelligible rationalities. The workers' movements are determined by the specific nature of a given work site, the contractor's instructions and their self-organization. Instructions and organization correspond to the needs of the construction project in terms of time and kind of work required, the skills of the workers themselves, and the relationships between each other and with the contractor⁹⁶. The workers' movements on the construction site are habitual but relatively free (especially when contrasted with factory workers, for instance), whilst respecting the need for adaptation and coordination.

The site in the opening vignette was made up of two main working spaces: the spacious dining/drinking area, that needed to be painted, and the small adjacent kitchen that was being renovated (i.e. tiled and electrically connected). I was occupied in the former space, together with the least skilled workers: Javier, Pedro, Arturo. Juan had called John because he needed extra pairs of hands that day. Therefore, even though John was a

⁹⁵ See chapter 2 for a discussion on how this changes for different kind of workers and impacts their position within the industry.

⁹⁶ In the example given, Juan's need for a relatively large workforce because of the contractual commitments, resulted in a composition of workers mostly employed via the relationships described in chapter 4. As for some this was not the main form of employment, the duration of their presence at the site was differing.

skilled welder, he and his friend were also painting within the same space, engaging with it according to another set of capabilities⁹⁷. Inside the kitchen, Matthew, Emilio and William, the most skilled of the builders, were working together. When Jaime arrived with his son Marvin, he worked for a while in the kitchen on the electrical system, and once his task was finished he switched to painting. Marvin also worked in the kitchen, helping the three workers and when his help was no longer needed, he came to paint.

The following week, there was more painting work to be done at the restaurant, and a small cement job to be completed nearby. The working crew was smaller than the one described above, and Juan had found another day labourer. After asking if he was afraid of heights, Juan allocated him to paint on the upper part of a scaffolding, but soon moved him over to break cement and then mix it. The demands of particular jobs require that workers with their varying skills move within (and between) work sites. Therefore, flexibility in task management is necessary to complete the work on time and maximise the builder's labour on site.

These movements are partly managed by the contractor, who assigns tasks, and partly by the workers themselves. The extent to which cooperation between workers follows a hierarchy dictated by expertise⁹⁸ depends upon the kind of product that needs to be delivered. The painting job required relatively low expertise, and we decided among ourselves when to switch roles, change positions or which sections to finish first without anyone assuming a leading role. The workers in the kitchen coordinated with each other in tiling, but Marvin was dependent on the more skilled workers for instructions as he was their helper (*ayudante*).

⁹⁷ John's flexibility in accepting this kind of work while being a skilled worker needs to be contextualized within his lengthy acquaintance with Juan (they were neighbours and John had worked extensively in the previous years with Juan), and John's recent venture as an independent welder working in the market at piece rate (cf. 1.1.3).

⁹⁸ More on how the organization of work prevented skills acquisition in chapter 1.

The skills-based hierarchy does not translate into an authoritarian relationship between workers variously positioned within it. Rather, relationships between workers are of an authoritative (rather than authoritarian) nature, based on 'achieved status' (Linton 1936, 115). These relationships which emerge between workers in the fluid movements of the worksite are based on the status that each worker has earned. Status is the result of individual effort (Linton 1936, 113–31). Someone's personal initiative is stressed by workers themselves who appreciate willingness to learn. The physicality of the work itself stands as evidence for the evaluation of skill acquisition from which a worker's status derives. These hierarchical relations are expressed relationally in the organization of division of labour on site.

On site, one follows the instructions of a skilled builder not because of an assigned position of power, but based on the respect that they have earned due to their competence (more on this below). In fact, skilled workers asked, rather than told, an unskilled worker to carry out a particular task. For instance, Javier and Carlos' criticism of another worker at the former's son's birthday party (§ 4.1) was centered around the skilled worker's authoritarian tone in telling Javier what to do, rather than asking him. Authority dependent upon achieved status cannot be explicitly enforced. Authority is expressed while accommodating autonomy by asking rather than commanding. Thus, while a hierarchy operates based on respect earned according to skill, there is also an underlying egalitarian ethos on the worksite between workers. They understand the common nature of their labour as productive and the products of their labour as the outcome of collective efforts timely coordinated within the worksite, as I show in the following sections. Thus, while there is a supervision and orientation of tasks according to hierarchy, the complementarity of their work which is constitutive of the activity space of the workplace corresponds to a mutual respect which emphasizes horizontality rather than verticality.

Builders, when compared with industrial factory and service workers are more autonomous in their task divisions and relatively free from managerial oversight because supervisors need to maintain trust and cooperation with them (Thiel 2012). Moreover, some tradesmen own their tools which gives them the alternative of going into their own business, and they are relied upon for the very fabrication of products (Applebaum 1981, 59–76)⁹⁹. The degree of autonomy diminishes moving to the bottom of the skill-based hierarchy. This is because skilled workers organize the work of helpers and labourers, who are dependent upon their instructions. Also, skilled workers need to be trusted by contractors more than unskilled labourers because they organize work in their absence and have a higher level of knowledge regarding how to go about particular tasks (cf. ch. 2). The nature of labour in construction is organized through hierarchical relations based on status achieved largely because of skill knowledge. By looking at the activities of workers, it becomes apparent that builders have space to negotiate their positions with respect to their autonomy and that the relationships with the contractor and between them are not manifestly authoritarian.

Indeed, these relationships are not mediated between workers in assertive ways, rather they tend to be expressed in horizontal terms, and this results in cooperation and coordination between workers within time and space in relatively autonomous ways, which becomes necessary because of the contingencies of the work on site. The 'hard' outlines of the product to be delivered influence the spatial organization of work (movement hence adapts itself to the site), as the workforce must be coordinated according to its differential skills. These skills constitute the principle upon which authoritative but not authoritarian decision-making occurs within a pattern of relative autonomy.

⁹⁹ Trade unions and guilds impact worker's autonomy and their apprenticeship practices in different ways, but in Belize such institutions do not exist for construction workers.

5.3 Rest, work, earn

The way in which work is organized within space and time means that the contractor cannot constantly supervise because he is also visiting other sites, meeting owners, transporting and borrowing tools and providing materials (in the above example: lights, pressure gun, brushes). On the one hand, this encourages a certain degree of autonomy as the workers have to make decisions in his absence. On the other hand, the lack of control constitutes one of the contractor's worries. Juan explained the challenges of being involved in different sites:

Before I used to work in two or three workplaces at a time, going from one to the other during the day. [...] Now I work in only one site. People call me and wait for me if I can't do the job. They wait for me. I need to supervise because if I am not here nothing gets done, it seems that they are working but they are not.

As seen in the above vignette, workers took longer and more frequent breaks in the absence of Juan. Especially because the work at the restaurant was taking place on a Sunday, the workers showed particular propinquity to resting (and alcohol consumption) that day. However, taking breaks from work, even if less frequently than in the example given, was part of the working practice as I witnessed at different sites. When I let slip to John that I was tired, towards the end of the day, he commented with an unsurprised face: 'Fuck! Of course, you've never stopped!'. He straightforwardly reminded me that the time spent at work was not only made of labouring, and he insisted that resting was as integral to the working schedule. Building work is subject to 'sequentialism' (Thiel 2013, 77) since the beginning of some tasks are dependent on the completion of others (cf. § 1.1.2). The sequential and simultaneous character of the many activities undertaken based on self-coordination amongst workers in habitual routines which are developed over time (cf. Marchand 2009, 177), meant that actions needed to be coordinated in time. This did not only apply to labouring: workers

coordinated their resting time too, working together but also taking breaks together. Resting and labouring are therefore complementary in constituting the activity space of the construction site.

Whilst the contractor weighs up his profits in terms of time (the workers are paid per day or by the hour, he earns by project completion) and is interested in the timely conclusion of a job, workers slow down the speed of their labour with the purpose of increasing their pay. For instance, Javier highlighted to me that while he thought other contractors paid more, with Juan '*trabajamos tranquilos*' ('we work with no rush/at our own pace') because they were able to extend few hours of work into a whole pay day by manipulating the rhythm and the time they spent labouring (and resting), or as Juan put it: 'it seems that they are working but they are not'. The workers are thus able to exercise relative autonomy in deciding not only how to coordinate (who does what and when) but also the rhythm/pace at which work takes place.

For construction workers, pausing from labouring constitutes a break from repetitive and boring tasks that can be seen as an adaptation to the physical and psychological constraints of work (Thiel 2013, 85). Moreover, this manipulation of time can be seen as a workers' tactic. De Certeau theorized 'tactic' as an 'art of the weak' (1984, 37), a calculated but isolated action that takes advantage of particular opportunities that present themselves through fractures in the surveillance of the powerful. For De Certeau (Ibid. 38), tactics become effective in relation to 'a clever *utilization of time*, of the opportunities it presents and also of the play that it introduces into the foundation of power.' (Ibid. 38-9 original italics). When taking a timely break, workers manipulate labouring time, thus affecting the rhythm of the construction process for which the contractor is responsible. By expanding construction time, they take control from the contractor over working conditions and pay. Nevertheless, this control is situational, in the sense of occurring during the single working day and not modifying pay ratio permanently. The manipulation of rest/labouring time, linked to easing

fatigue or/and to larger economic gains, do not ultimately revert the power relations on site.¹⁰⁰

Workers try not to make their tactics obvious (as evident from their rushing to work when the contractor approached), but they know that contractors are aware of them. Therefore, the diverging economic interests of workers and contractors are negotiated on an almost covert basis. This tension between diverging interests is further enhanced because construction commitments often result in time pressure. Based on when the project must be completed, deadlines are set for what needs to be accomplished by the end of each working day. Although this may be achieved by prolonging the working day beyond the usual eight hours, it is more commonly achieved by increasing the rate of work within the day, with contractors making constant remarks to push the workers to go about their tasks more speedily. In the case of the restaurant, this was highlighted by commercial needs (re-opening day), further stressed by the owners complaining. The owners' hurry to move the machinery into the kitchen before the work was fully complete resulted in a further waste of time (and money) from the contractor's perspective: it was necessary to go back and replace the broken tile.

Mediation which took place when workers were under time pressures further elucidates the relative autonomy of workers and the possibilities of them negotiating with their contractor more overtly. The sight of Juan cleaning the table with the aim to accelerate the end of the working day is an example of the contractor's involvement in labouring at the same level of workers. Another instance demonstrates this point more explicitly. One day, Juan had a shortage of workers and needed to finish a job. Matthew, helped by Javier and Marvin, had asked Juan to work alongside him. After work, Matthew complicity told me:

¹⁰⁰ Workers do not directly challenge or resist (Scott 1985), they 'cannot keep what they won' (de Certeau 1984, 37), from the powerful (Scheper-Hughes 1993, 471-72).

I put him [Juan] to work, did you see?

Giuseppe: What do you mean?

He doesn't work (*'Él no trabaja'*), he just comes to check. But today I told him that we aren't many and he has to cut [tiles].

In this case, the autonomy of the workers resulted in the entrance of the contractor into the activity space as physical producer. The contractor also accepted to work because he was aware of the pitfalls of completing work late: 'Time is everything in construction!', he told me the same day. The contractor's tasks are seen by workers in terms of accounting and organization (as seen in § 1.1.1 and § 2.1). Matthew's remarks – 'He doesn't work' – stress the different positionality of workers and contractor in the site for their different roles, while affirming a degree of autonomy over that space: he had put the contractor, who otherwise 'checks', to work alongside himself and his colleagues.

If movement within the work site results from contractor's needs and workers' relative autonomy, the same can be said of time. Diverging economic interests constitute the ground on which more or less overt negotiations over time take place. There are seemingly established rules that the contractor tries to enforce and workers to break, but their normalization means that labouring time is an outcome of mediations (possible because of the relative autonomy of workers and contractor's indulgence), rather than normative compliance or contravention.

5.4 Time and quality, quality of time

Juan's seemingly obvious remark about the 'need to have the work done fast but also well', stresses the correlation of time and quality. Time and quality are important because they are part of the commercial commitments of the contractor, and their mismanagement can result in extra expenses. Moreover, the time it takes to complete a project together with the quality

of the product influence the reputation of a contractor, and thus the chances of him securing contracts in the future. Juan seemed to be in a good position as far as his reputation was concerned. He used to brag, 'people call me and wait for me'. I also saw him secure different contracts from other business owners close to the restaurant.

From the perspective of workers, time and quality do not only have monetary value, nor are they confined to concerns over the rhythms of labour and rest during the workday. Time management derives from an understanding of time as intrinsically impacting the product through the rhythms and speed of labouring. At the end of a working day, William complained about the pressures from Juan to speed up the work, as the contractor did not seem to take into consideration that 'things need their time, they have a precise order.' William's words not only reflect the negotiations between contractor and workers on the time needed (even under pressure) to successfully complete a task, but also show that the time negotiated on the basis of these interests is crucial because it is entangled with the organization of work in order to deliver the product ('*things* need their time'). In other words, to build it is necessary to have enough time so as to allow an orderly development of work. To use the distinction which E.P. Thompson (1967) made in historical terms with regards to time and work-discipline, William stressed the primacy of task-orientation, of which he could claim intimate knowledge, over the clock-time by which he was paid.

Therefore, time management is not only negotiated in relation to the supervision (and absence) of the contractor. The quality of time (the rhythm and speed of work) impacts the product, that influences not only the contractor's, but also the workers' reputation (cf. § 1.1.4). Indeed, taking too much time to rest, or working visibly less than others is not seen as positive by the workers themselves. Being a 'hard worker' (or a '*chambeador*', cf. § 4.3) and demonstrating the ability to do a good job, impact workers' reputations. This is manifested in the product delivered, as Emilio explained:

now, if is seen that you've done a little *work that looks like...* 'iPucha! [Wow!]' ...*is looked at* and they say 'Hey', they say, 'for this one there we all got this week's salary' or something like that, [...] there you earn, depending on what you know, there you earn respect.

To 'read a building' is to appreciate the knowledge of those who made it (Moore 2013, 68)¹⁰¹. Beneath the 'hard' physical façade, it is possible to find evidence of the skills possessed by those who built it, and this evaluation in turn depends upon the skills possessed by those looking at it (see § 2.4). The physicality of the product also speaks of the moral qualities of the builder (hard work, working for the team), and mediates respect earned because it is skill and moral qualities which contribute to a builder's status. Moreover, the finished product has a definitive impact on the contractor's reputation.

Thus, workers are generally not willing to sacrifice or compromise the quality of the product of their labour. The outcome of the work is something to be proud of because it signals the capacity of those who built it (cf. §2.4). In chats after work, builders remembered jobs that were substandard in quality, and complained bitterly that the work had to be re-executed, becoming a waste of time and money. This was at times seen as resulting from the false assurances of the builder at fault, who had claimed to be able to carry out a task that he was not. Working 'hard' and working 'well', and being honest about one's skills (i.e. the capacity to work well), are thus pivotal to a builder's status. This in turn, improves their possibilities of being employed and rewarded again.

The mutuality of interests between skilled workers and contractors in terms of reputation is based on productivity. Considering both the process and product of labour, the time of completion complements the quality of the

¹⁰¹ See Lyon (2013) for a discussion of how the sequential nature of construction work means that products of work are visually concealed by one another, and labour becomes itself invisible.

work. Time and quality constitute another area of negotiation between workers and contractors, not least because they are central to the reputation of both. Reputational concerns, alongside employability issues which link workers and contractor, are discussed between builders. This is done by commentaries shared in and out the workplace, which consider labouring processes and the resulting physical products. They also assert their knowledge regarding the appropriate rhythm of work which impacts quality of products. This, together with their physical endurance and skills, contributes to their reputation. Thus, rather than simply a matter of utilitarian calculus between workers and contractors, productivity is evaluated among workers themselves who judge each other's attitudes towards work, not least as skilled observers on site.

Focusing on time reveals the ambiguities which underlie the ways in which workers and contractors, and workers amongst themselves, evaluate their relationships. Builders slow down (by manipulating rhythm and pausing) in order to relieve stress and increase pay, but they need to do this without affecting too much the timeliness upon which theirs and their contractor's reputation is based. Between themselves, workers value working hard. The coordination and interrelation of labour means that individual input has collective repercussions in term of productivity. To work accordingly means acquiring respect between workers, which as seen is the basis of achieved status on which relationships on site are based. The ambiguities that arise within the activity space of the worksite for it is there that labouring takes place, is subject to control and manipulation by contractors and builders, and is evaluated based upon principles which pertain the work process itself. Thus, the quality of time on the work site also results from an understanding of the builders' reputation between themselves and with contractors, seemingly running counter to their interest in slowing labouring so as to rest or earn more, as outlined in the previous section.

5.5 Young, willing and brave

As seen above (§ 1.1), the constancy in working alongside the same workers, the kind of tasks assigned, and the time spent working together, are essential to the acquisition of skills necessary to advance in a trade. The work site is where skills are acquired through practice. A helper assisting a skilled worker learns through following instructions and as well as more tacit education: seeing how the work is done, and doing it himself (Strati 2003).

The 'helper' or '*ayudante*' (the English and Spanish word used are equivalents) is in the position of an apprentice. This is an informal apprenticeship, in the sense that rules are implicit, there is no formal (official and legal) agreement between apprentice and employer, and there is no rite of passage or any precise acknowledgement of the end of the training (Graves 1989).¹⁰² Apprenticeship as a kind of social organization within this specific context and as a field of analysis of processual learning (Dilley 2015) can be analysed off and on site. The social relations developed off-site between workers, which were the object of the previous chapter, incorporate apprenticeship as a transmission not only of physical skills but also of economic and social relations (Coy 1989). The kind of learning on site, as in other forms of apprenticeship, 'is personal, hands-on, and experiential.' (Coy 1989, 1) On site, the transmission of skills fits into the sequence of work and the skills-based hierarchy. The assessment of helpers, usually younger than skilled workers, depends upon pedagogic processes that take place at the construction site. Teaching and learning take place simultaneously with labouring kinds of labour within the activity space. A helper's abilities are evaluated by observing the way in which they labour and what they produce.

¹⁰² It is debatable whether informal apprenticeship should be simply put under the rubric of informal method of skill acquisition. The use of the label apprentice would be limited to contractual relationships of specific duration between a novice and a master with the aim of supplying the former with experience and recognition of mastery, and the latter with cheap labour or fees (Lancy 2012). However, I prefer to use the concept of informal apprenticeship since there are similarities with other forms of apprenticeship which suggest a fruitful use of the literature in comparative terms.

Moreover, not only physical skills are transmitted and tested, but also other qualities (or 'professional values' such as sincerity and motivation [Singleton 1989, 29]) are considered important for their work. Thus, as workers are evaluated for working hard and consistently within one's abilities, helpers are also subjects of scrutiny in this regard. Helpers are evaluated with particular attention as such evaluation is seen to contribute to their process of learning (although learning on site is a lifelong process, I was told). Thereby, helpers are also becoming skilled observers in their own right: they learn not only how to labour, but also how to evaluate the products of labour and the kinds of behaviour which facilitate effective work. With practice, he is becoming a more skilled observer and agent (Meløe 1988). Tradesmen observe helpers on site not only with an eye on the use of hands and tools in producing, but also for the qualities that the helpers exhibit while working.

From this perspective, showing a willingness to learn (or *querer aprender*) was another aspect that impacted the extent to which a particular worker could learn the trade, and was thus constitutive of the 'activity space'. Emilio noted that he received more work from Juan by virtue of his skills when compared with less experienced builders. Even if Emilio was encouraging the contractor to work more with newcomers, Juan still wanted Emilio because of his meticulous approach to work. Juan used to ask Emilio to bring helpers if he needed, but Emilio could become dissatisfied with these helpers if he did not see what he described as willingness to learn: 'I wanted to teach him, a lot you know! He didn't want to learn (*No quiso aprender*)!'. For Emilio, this was the reason why some labourers did not advance in the trade: 'because they don't make an effort, and their mind is focused just on this [simple task], they just want to do this!' However, he also recognized: 'or also they work with bosses who don't give them the opportunity.' Thus, while occupational mobility was not exclusively seen as a result of one's active

engagement with learning processes¹⁰³, willingness was indispensable and evaluated while working.

If willingness is necessary in order to advance in the trade, bravado can be the condition sine qua non for working in construction. Indeed, bravado constitutes one of the personal attitudes taken into consideration in evaluating a worker, along with physical endurance (i.e. working hard), honesty (about abilities) and willingness (to learn). Since the physical space of the work site often develops vertically, it is through fearlessness of heights in particular that a worker demonstrates courage.

Being able to labour on heights is seen as a prerequisite for workers, and valued by contractors and builders alike. Pete, a carpenter and contractor, described to me his will to get back to work after a major incident at work that had impaired his vision from one eye:

When I get my accident most of de people 'Bwaay...' Even my ma, my ma kyaant handel it, my ma se 'Yo gween back again?' Ah say 'Right back ma'. When I get this [points at his eye], six weeks and ah gaan back, I climb one roof haaai! I walk it, 230 feet inna lent, to de boada.¹⁰⁴

I was myself asked if I was afraid of heights before Juan sent me on the top of some scaffolding during the work at the restaurant (it was the first time working for him which involved being elevated from the floor). The week after, a labourer employed for the day was assigned the same task, following the same question, but was soon reassigned to cement work nearby. Some of the workers later conjectured that the labourer was relocated not because

¹⁰³ A third aspect workers emphasized as limiting learning was that some builders were just lacking intelligence.

¹⁰⁴ 'When I had my accident most of the people "Boy...". Even my mother, my mother couldn't cope with it, my mother said, "Are you going back again?" I said, "Right back mother". When I got this [points at his eye], six weeks and I went back, I climbed a hiiigh roof! I walked on it, 230 feet in length, to the border.'

Juan needed him in another place, but because he was afraid of standing on the scaffolding. Such comments stress the importance that taking this kind of risk carries both for the work itself and for the other workers' assessments of each other¹⁰⁵ (Gherardi and Nicolini 2002; Iacuone 2005; Strati 2003).

In a similar fashion, after Jaime asked Juan to employ his son Marvin, Juan had the young male climb a high structure. The contractor recounted that when he saw Marvin working hard high above the ground, he decided that the young male 'passed the test' and started to regularly call him. Perhaps enjoying the height and proud of his own bravery, Marvin himself asked me on another occasion to take a picture of him with his phone from the top of a building where we were securing a sign, with the city at sunset as the background.

As evaluations about the workers are based on performance at the work site, personal qualities are assessed alongside skills. Their disposition towards learning becomes part of assessing those workers who are in the process of acquiring skills on site. Moreover, newcomers are trialled for their willingness to learn and their braveness as they move within the physical contours of the site.

¹⁰⁵ The bravado associated with heights is indispensable for ironworkers, who are specialized in construction work on high structures. Ironworkers building skyscrapers in North America are exemplary of a specialized trade associated with qualities deemed necessary for building at heights. These qualities are in turn related to an ethnic identity since Native America ethnic groups have historically been predominant in this sector (Blanchard 1983; Weitzman 2010; Cherry 1974). In Belize multi-storey buildings are becoming more common, while structures reaching the height of skyscrapers do not exist.



Figure 11 Not being afraid of heights is even more important on big projects

I conclude this section with a caveat regarding gender. Helpers are observed for their compliance in showing willingness to learn, working hard and be brave. In a male dominated sector (see Introduction), these attitudes can be seen as a performative aspect of masculinity. There is some emphasis in the ethnographic literature on the construction sector on the ways in which physical work is seen by builders (and men in other professions) as quintessential manly (i.e. builders are real men who do real work) (Paap 2006, 141; cf. Thiel 2012, 109) ¹⁰⁶. However, with regards to my interlocutors, the stress on physical endurance is understood in terms of fitness for the work and proof of one's aptitude in terms of the attributes related to status, rather than an emphasis on muscularity as a sign of masculinity (Thiel 2012, 110). Moreover, I did not find workers considering contractors less manly because their work was managerial in nature. Other aspects outlined in the course of the thesis also point to male specific

¹⁰⁶ I found occasionally hard work described in this way (cf. § 3.5), but more related to the pride over one's efforts to make a living by engaging in exhausting work, than in opposition to managerial tasks or office jobs.

understandings and behaviours. Outside the workplace, bravado in terms of being ready for physical confrontation (§ 4.1), or being vigilant about bodily self-presentation (§ 2.2), is also inscribed within normative notions of what a man is ought to be (or how one should behave in order to avoid danger). Earning is tied to one's role as father and spouse (§§ 2.3, 3.5, 3.6, 4.4, 5.7), and banter is often based upon a taken for granted heterosexual masculinity (see next section). On site there is occasional consumption of pornographic material which workers show to each other on phones, or catcalling towards women passing outside (cf. Datta 2009). However, these elements are not expressed in a way that suggests a distinctively masculine character of these men *as* construction workers (see Paap 2006, for an ethnography which emphasizes construction work peculiar and pervasive gendered discourses and practices).

The worksite is certainly a place where heteronormative ideas are reproduced. While there is a taken for granted heterosexual masculinity within the workplace, this corresponds to wider gendered ideas of what a man is, rather than a work-specific 'subculture'. Builders have in common the fact that they are producers and that they are all men. Within the male-only activity space of the building site, behaviour is evaluated with respect to both views of (hegemonic) masculinity operating outside of it and conceptions of what makes a builder fit for the collaborative and sometimes risky nature of the work.

5.6 Laughing on site

As much as 'work' pervades the lives of builders even during recreational moments when they are not on site (see ch. 4), 'comedic exchanges' also appear in the workplace. The concentration and physical stress demanded by labouring might seem to prevent interactions that do not strictly pertain to the tasks underway, but workers are able to socialize during labouring as well as rest time. Ironic interaction offers a key example.

The comic is used as part of a spectrum from the complicit to the derisive, as much collectively as through one-to-one interactions. It allows for one-way mocking of another person as well as banter-like exchanges (generally positively evaluated because they show wit and contribute to a friendly environment). Here, instead of dwelling on how verbal exchanges function, which I briefly touch upon in light of specific examples, I wish to emphasize how the comic is constitutive of working time on site (without, of course, being limited to it). Taking breaks and making jokes creates cohesiveness among builders and eases the sense of bodily fatigue resulting from monotonous tasks (Thiel 2012, 74–75; cf. Applebaum 1981, 32). Focusing on jokes (and comic exchanges in general) provides insights about the people that make them, how they demonstrate their wit, as well as the 'circumstances (social, historical, gendered or colonial) in which they and their sense of humour are situated.' (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 221) Thus, comic interactions reveal the relations and positionality of workers as much as, for instance, the ways they use time. Occurring within the workspace, comic exchanges represent one of the ways in which builders navigate hierarchical relationships, and reveals different affiliations based upon perceived principles that operate in the work site but also pertain the wider social and conceptual contexts in which these men are situated.

For workers, the comic serves the purposes of mediating conflict, asserting one's position as well as subverting the position of others, and assumes these features as the objects/subjects of laughter, the situation and the participants involved change. Before giving some ethnographic examples to elucidate these points, it is necessary to note that participating in joking exchanges sometimes as a witness, sometimes on the receiving end and sometimes doling out jokes myself, revealed some of these characteristics to me because I was in a peculiar position given my working/class/racial/national background (See Basso 1979 for a fine example of an analysis centred on irony and ethnic differences; cf. Fernandez and Huber 2001).

The comic can serve group cohesiveness, both reinforcing things that a group has in common, and highlighting things which are other to them. Remarks about the supposed cowardice of the worker who was moved from the scaffolding to the cement work were humorous but also derisive. This was possible because the comments were directed to someone outside of the usual working crew of Juan (prompted in part, I suspect, because he was of African descent), they were made within such a group and concealed from him. Bravado, as a work-related quality (cf. 5.5), and lack of it was used to separate a day labourer from the other workers, the latter sharing a sense of comic at the expense of the former. The jokes around the rum bitter in the form of warnings because of its alleged aphrodisiac properties similarly created a sense of commonality within the crew without any external referent. In both cases, joking created a mutual recognition around a shared sense of masculinity in the workplace, in one case in relation to bravado, in the other, sexual disposition. Joking, in this case centred around ideas of masculinity, generates a sense of belonging between those who laugh together.



Figure 12 Rum bitters

Jokes were shared between the contractor (himself not lacking in a sense of humour) and workers and generated a sense of closeness that pervaded worker-contractor relations (more on this in the section below). These exchanges asserted a common ground between workers and contractor, but they were not likely to make the contractor into the object of laughter. A major exception was mocking the Spanish grammatical mistakes of the contractor, in the form of selected phrases repeated at times in his presence without him being aware. This provoked a shared suppressed chuckling (inclusive my own) and reverted the working hierarchy of employer-employees in a playful manner. The comic in this sense can be seen as tactical. For Berger, the comic is ubiquitous in everyday life where it emerges as an 'intrusion' (Berger 2014, 6). Moreover, the comic necessitates 'the skill of performative timing' (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 215), is short-lived and occurs at precise moments. Tactics are also deployed in a timely way. In this case irony is tactical because workers could not overtly challenge the contractor's authority but affirmed superior mastery of Spanish. It suggests that hierarchy is limited to certain occupational aspects, while creating a commonality between workers subordinated to the mocked contractor.

Labouring workers and joking workers are the same people, but the premises of labouring relations and joking relations do not correspond. The relationships established by joking can run parallel or across the hierarchy of labour on site, and comic interactions are based upon a reciprocal understanding: 'one is by custom permitted [...] to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence' (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 195; cf. Sykes 1966). As seen, statuses on site are tacitly understood but not explicitly performed since workers value autonomy and they need to maintain co-ordination and cooperation on site. The comic, creating a momentary situation based upon a reciprocal understanding, shifts the perception of the workplace because is based on a different relation than the labouring one. Frederick Barth (1966), discussing the roles of crews on fishing boats, noted the cooperative nature of work, where authority and responsibility are shared differentially among crew members with different

statuses. Rather than claiming 'positional authority' (Ibid. 8) (or in line with this chapter skill-based authority), crew members show their skills, leadership qualities and dependability through their actions. Barth notes that joking is a behaviour that denies claims to authority, the absence of which is necessary at times for cooperation on a vessel. Thus, while affirming autonomy (without necessarily challenging authority), the comic with its 'frequent though brief intrusions into ordinary social interaction' (Berger 2014, 62) on site, offers different perspectives on the activity space of the building site. The pervasiveness of the comic, and the reciprocal relations which are its premise, sometimes subverts or complicates the hierarchy based on status manifest in the organization of labour on site.

In light of the fact that workers at the restaurant came from distinct national and ethnic groups that were often inward-facing (e.g. eating and taking breaks separately), Lee Bway's joke about music can be seen as a nonaggressive response to ethnic tension expressed in the form of musical preferences. It re-affirmed differences while easing tension. I was myself the object of mocking on an ethno-racial basis. Since in Latin America, Argentinians are seen as the closest national group to Italians (because of the Italian large migration to the South American country especially between the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century), I was at times addressed in Spanish with the addition of '*che*' (a common Argentinian interjection) in whatever sentence. Moreover, I negotiated my irritation of being initially addressed as *gringo* (i.e. a US citizen) by suggesting that *güero* (i.e. of clear skin complexion) might suit better. Consequently, William especially would greet me with '*Grin...! Sorry güero! It's true that yes, you're güero! But gringo no!*', making us both laugh. Though provocative, enjoying laughter by focusing on the very traits that made us different created a sense of commonality. Marchand's (2009) work in Mali, among construction workers in a context of a strong association between ethnic identity and trade hierarchy, provides useful insights into this phenomenon. He noted that jocular exchange 'on construction sites brings underlying tensions to the surface' (Ibid. 56), producing and reproducing ethnic-trade divisions.

Since relationships upon which banter is based are more egalitarian than labouring ones, they also accommodate communion between members of distinct groups. Thus, seemingly paradoxically, banter has the effect of 'wedging two groups apart while keeping them together.' (Marchand 2009, 56) As the examples given so far suggest, and as I further illustrate below, comic exchanges generate cohesion because of the very nature of the relationship they establish through making attributes of difference or similarity explicit.

Once, when casting cement, the owner of the house that was being extended who was of African descent appeared delighted by the fact that I was working for him. This situation was a reversal of the skin complexion-based hierarchy that pervades Belize, in line with the rest of the Caribbean and the Americas. He asked sarcastically if I was enjoying the 'exercise' and the sun. He suggested that as a 'white bwoy [boy]', I was experiencing not a 'job' but 'work', the former an employment which does not consist of physical effort in contrast with the latter which, he suggested, I was used to seeing others do. I pointed out that more than the 'work' itself, I was going to enjoy the moment when I was going to have cash in hand, and joked that 'I like the sun in the night!' 'In the night you enjoy the moon, there is no sun!' he replied, to which I responded: 'Of course there is, you just don't see it! That's why I like it in the night!' We had a laugh. Even if irony reinforced the reversed hierarchy (I was white but he was my boss at that moment), a prompt reply created a momentary egalitarian ethos, given the 'permitted disrespect' underlying joking relationships (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 196). Once the job was finished, I sat with him, his tenant, the two other labourers and the mason, all equally chuckling at jokes about male-female sexual intercourse. As for the 'rum bitters', our jokes took a complicit tone as they were based on a taken-for-granted shared and heterosexually-oriented masculinity. These exchanges established commonality between the participants through the mutual laughter they provoked in revolving around themes that emphasized differences or similarities.

The comic also enters into the polyactivity of the workplace in moments of concentration and heightened attention. One day, Juan called one of his experienced welder friends, Boe, to help him on a job for a brief amount of time. Four of us built a three-floor scaffolding on the flat roof covering part of the first floor of a commercial business. We needed to secure a heavy, long sign on the façade of the building in front of the scaffolding, but extra hands were needed for the next phase. Boe arrived with two young males, likewise dark skinned, and quickly organized the crew. I was sent with these two workers onto the roof on the second floor of the building, facing down the scaffolding. We used ropes to move the sign to the right spot. Marvin assisted Boe and Emilio who, hanging in the balance of the scaffolding, adjusted the sign in order to hammer it to the wall. Because of his position, Boe dispensed instructions and safety warnings: 'Unu [your pl.] side more! Unu side more!' 'Come on!' 'Now stop here, unu more!' 'Take your time! No rush! Take your time!'. A little crowd enjoyed the show from the ground floor level and everyone was absolutely concentrated on the carefully coordinated task (see Tutt et al. 2013 on safety, communication and coordination). That was until Boe, under the weight of the sign that Emilio (with his body twisted and little direct vision) was trying to line up on the wall in order to mark out where it needed drilling, smiled and loudly called out: 'Find the hole! Find the hole!'

Everyone burst into laughter at the sexual innuendo, thus demonstrating how humour is pervasive and timely within the activities on sites. It also reiterates how masculinity expressed through specific situations and jokes constitutes a recognizable common ground between builders. Finally, it also exemplifies the mutability and quick response to which workers are habituated in allowing actors to enter the worksite and adapt their movements accordingly.

Within the activity space of the worksite, the comic works on two levels: as perception and as action. The comic element has a perceptual quality. According to Berger, the comic is a subjective experience based on 'the

perception of something objectively out there in the world' (Berger 2014, 33). Berger discusses the perception of the comic as being based on the experience of incongruity. Something is comic because it stands out in the non-comic background of ordinary experience. Also, as suggested earlier, comic exchanges modify perceptions of the worksite. Indeed, they establish relations different from (though not unrelated to) those of production. This leads to a consideration of the cognitive aspect of the comic: the comic offers a means of diagnosing the world and can serve as a 'popular sociology' (Berger 2014, 66), as insights about society emerge from comic perceptions of it. The comic interludes in the worksite are moments when subjective perceptions emerge out of the labouring routine within shared understandings (that allow jokes to be mutually intelligible and therefore understood as comic) and shed light on the workplace and the wider world as understood by builders¹⁰⁷. When taken seriously, the irony deployed by the builders I worked with suggest subjective epistemological insights within shared understandings about the work hierarchy, race and ethnic differences, and shared senses of masculinity.

The social aspect of the comic intrusion into the ordinary context of the workplace (that is labouring activities) leads us to consider it as an activity within the activity space in the worksite. It is meaningful if its premises are understood, and if it occurs in a situation socially defined and contained (Berger 2014) within relationships of 'privileged disrespect' (Radcliffe-Brown 1940). It has the effects of uniting while dividing, mediating, reaffirming, and criticizing. Thus, comedy is a mode of understanding the workplace as well as a reflection upon it. Also, it is a mode of acting within the workplace and constituting it as an activity space. While jokes often comment on differences, a joke's intelligibility is the precondition for the comic to exist and produces commonality in the working space. That is to say, even not laughing at a joke because its content is not considered funny signals that there is a shared understanding of the joke's premises. Finally, the ways in

¹⁰⁷ The comic, as distinguished from the everyday and at the same time part of it, assumes a similar epistemological stance as leisure (cf. ch. 4).

which the comic divides and unites are not the same as labouring. A working crew is also a laughing community, even if each of its members laughs, as well as labours, differently according to particular conditions.

5.7 Workers-contractor relationships in and out the work site

A contractor establishes personal ties with different workers, developed through the distinct duration of the working relationship. This spans from the brief interaction with a day labourer who, for instance, 'catches and kills', to years of collaboration with a trusted skilled worker (see § 1.1.4). These various degrees of proximity impact the ways in which mediation takes place in the workplace. For longer-lasting relationships, negotiations do not take place in a social vacuum; they must take into account aspects of the relationship which exceed the spatial and temporal dimensions of the work site. Looking at the relationships between workers and the contractor, who enters the worksite in order to supervise rather than labour, offers a perspective that goes beyond the conceptual realm of the activity space. This last section proposes a link between life on and off site, in line with the previous chapter.

As mentioned earlier, Juan had a close relationship with his regular workers, who generally saw him as a particularly benevolent contractor (cf. § 4.3). Most of them recognized that Juan usually provided lunch and gave them lifts home, things that exceeded his duties as an employer. Adding to years of acquaintance, there were instances when contractor and workers would temporarily live together. When Juan managed a project in Cayo district, he provided accommodation for the workers in his house there, and when workers like Matthew, who had moved out from Belize City, were working for him he would host them in his house in the city. There were also after-work moments of sociability between Juan and his employees, during which he acted as a patron offering drinks in his yard (and most of the time refusing my own offers to reciprocate), or in bars in case of jobs outside Belize City.

This was taken for granted by the workers. However, Juan also took part in other non-work-related moments in their lives. As well as recreational occasions such as fishing together, Juan would sometimes help them with material needs. Once for instance, I passed by Juan's house and stopped in order to help Javier load a fridge that was in the contractor's yard. We swapped that functioning fridge for the broken one Javier had at home, so the contractor could call an expert to fix it. Another time I attended the wake of one of the worker's fathers with Juan. The previous day, he had helped to move some of the tents for sheltering the attendees from possible rain, and on the day itself, he transported the other workers and I to the mass and funeral.

A relative sense of loyalty results from this closeness to the contractor. On the same work site described in the vignette, one of the owners approached me when Juan was absent and asked me if I was willing to earn a little extra by transporting some materials. That meant doing a side job while simultaneously being paid by Juan, and I was unsure how to assess the payment offered. Unsure about how to reply, I asked Matthew for his advice. With a quick look at the load, Matthew calculated that we needed another two workers and answered positively. However, the owner came back with half of the sum he had previously stipulated, suggesting that 'other people pay you less guys!', apologized and left the money on a table under a napkin holder, for us to pick up thus accepting the job. Matthew dismissed the new offer: 'It's cheap...I can ask Mr. Juan to lend me that money and he would without charging me [interest] for it!'

Besides these attitudes which were in many cases a result of longstanding relationships, Juan was generally considered to be *buena onda* (cool guy/easy going). During a gathering after work, weeks after the job at the restaurant, someone had let slip that John drunk the beer. Juan acknowledged it disapprovingly but without much complaint, in line with the fact that he had accepted responsibility with the restaurant owners and had not indulged in investigating who was responsible.

Moreover, the reliance of a contractor on his workers is dictated by their relative autonomy: it depends upon both the trust in the workers (necessary in order to have a job done according to the appropriate amount of time and to the standard expected), and the knowledge of the trade they possess because of their skills. The importance of sustaining a positive working relationship with a worker is directly proportional to the skills a worker possesses (and related to the time spent together). As a contractor has acquainted himself to a particular worker, and the worker has continued to learn the trade as a function of the time spent (also) with the contractor, the dismissal of a worker constitutes a loss for the contractor. This is also true when the contractor must end a working relationship for reasons outside his control:

Juan: I had a man working for me, Belizean. He was a really good worker, he worked with me for about fifteen years, I taught him a lot and he could do many different works. I could live him on the work site and he will do the job. [...] But he liked weed [i.e. marijuana]. He wanted to smoke at 12, after his lunch.

Giuseppe: But...this affected his work?

J.: Oh no. I don't have nothing wrong with that. [...] But sometimes we work in the city in houses where the people have their wife and kids. These people would smell and say: 'I don't want no one smoking in my house! If someone is smoking weed they have to leave!'. So eventually I had to let him go, after many years. And I spent a lot of time teaching him...

At other times, the situation did not reach a breaking point, and the most negative outcome for a worker would be not being called for the next job due to previous absenteeism. Once Juan had to do a tiling job but gave the day off to his workers who wanted to watch the September Carnival parade with their families¹⁰⁸. He suggested that they come and work the day after,

¹⁰⁸ This month is particularly festive and celebrations are usually street-oriented in Belize (they have a 'transient' character [Miller 1994]). The September Celebrations include

a Sunday, so as to comply with the building schedule. However, the majority of them did not show up.

Giuseppe: What will you do then?

Juan: I can't do much. One of them didn't even collect his pay yesterday! But you know, they have responsibility, some of them have wife and kids. I have responsibility too, they have families, so there is not much I will do.

He admitted however that he felt 'a bit guilty too because I bought an "Elephant Foot" [large rum bottle] and drunk with them Friday night after work...'. When lunchtime was near, they asked to buy some soft drinks and all left for the shop. Javier explained to me later that they needed a break since they were all hangover. Javier was surprised and disappointed, but did not stop them.

From the workers' perspective, establishing a good relationship with one contractor is also advantageous, as it assures a possible continuity in employment, safeguarding against the fluctuating demands of the industry. It also means that younger and less experienced workers in particular are less exposed to the risks of working for unknown contractors. When asking about previous experiences working for new contractors, or in one-time job performances for other bosses, it was common to hear stories of exaggerated delays in payment, resulting in smaller earnings, or even the loss of a salary (cf. § 4.3).

Day labourers do not benefit from these securities, because the work is casual and they do not always have the chance to develop the continuous, beneficial relationship with a contractor. Thus, the extent and flexibility of

Independence Day (21st), the Battle of St. George's Caye Day (10th), and the Carnival, alongside parades, festivals and events during the whole month (I noted at least three events a day in Belize City in September).

negotiation and the autonomy of the worker are both substantially diminished. This leads to an easier dismissal from the contractor's perspective, and can result in a more abrupt and drastic termination of the working relationship. Although it was not a typical case, the way in which Dylan (cf. ch. 1), an unskilled worker, was fired by the contractor for whom he worked is revealing. After accusing him of being late, the contractor wanted him to work some extra-time. At Dylan's refusal he fired him, and after a few days returned a backpack to him that Dylan forgot at the site. There was some change missing from the backpack, and Dylan complained about it to his former employer. According to Dylan, they had a quarrel about the missing money and after few days, the contractor threatened him with a gun and later pressed charges against Dylan for threatening words. On the night of Dylan's arrest in front of his children, and the following day, I kept his partner company while she tried to stop him from being imprisoned. At the end, Dylan did plea guilty, explaining that 'I don't want to go back and forth [to/from the court], and less I am around the police better it is', given a pecuniary penalty and was luckily freed.

Although extreme, this example reveals that these relationships exist on a spectrum that spans from friendship-like ties to possible antagonistic interaction (within the wider context of violence in Belize City) based upon the highly personal nature of the bonds between workers and contractors. They depend on the particular individuals involved, as well as on the features outlined in the previous sections of this chapter that have shown how autonomy and hierarchy frame workers' scope for negotiation depending on their own positionality in terms of experience within the industry. As these are played out in the construction site and exposed both in labouring practices and ideas about them, they encompass relations and actions that pervade (but are not limited to) the work site, and develop through personal ties.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I adopted an ethnographic perspective on skilled and skilled-to-be workers within the building site. I analysed worker actions and interactions as forming an activity space in the worksite. The adaptable organization of labour to changing workplaces and crew composition rests upon workers' autonomy. Their autonomy is apparent in the egalitarian way in which skilled workers instruct helpers. Tradesmen's authority can be enforced because their status is achieved by demonstrating their knowledge in the worksite. Worker's autonomy is also traceable in their collective modification of the labouring rhythm by adopting quasi-covert tactics with positive effects on their pay and degree of fatigue. However, workers also depend on the quality and timeliness of their work output for status. They understand that time impacts their products in terms of quality, even though they have to meet deadlines for completion. They therefore retain autonomy in evaluating the correct time in which to build, on which their reputation depends, while they try to strike a balance in between labouring and resting, which can impact their salary. This is on the one hand related to their relationships with contractors and granting employability. On the other hand, they value working hard and well because their activities impact on their horizontal relations with one another. Depending on the outcome of their work, they earn respect which forms the basis of their non-authoritarian relationships.

The worksite is also where evaluations based on shared values take place with regards to helpers. Skilled-to-be workers learn a trade on the worksite, acquiring knowledge in terms of labouring and work-related values, as well as how to skilfully judge their and other work. As part of the polyactivity which characterizes the activity space of the worksite, comedic exchanges represent an interlude by which builders affirm commonalities, mediate difference and challenge authority. Finally, skilled workers are in the position of establishing stronger personal ties to contractors than unskilled labourers. Interactions on and off the worksite between skilled workers and contractors

can reduce tensions arising from divergent interests, securing a more stable employment for the former group and a reliable pool of skilled workers for the latter.

In the following chapter, I expand upon the discussion on life and work conditions described in the chapters so far, giving a perspective on workers' and contractors' past life trajectories, and present life and work in Belize City, from the perspective of the futures that they envisioned for themselves.

Chapter 6. Journeys

This conclusive chapter follows the ongoing journeys of the workers previously encountered in the thesis. By journeys, I refer to their lives as they recounted them to me with a particular emphasis on the relationship between their past and present and as they are linked to ideas of how they saw themselves in the future. The chapter is structured around a juxtaposition between the American Dream of Central American migrants and what I call the Belizean Dream of long term Belize City dwellers. The former is the idea of moving to North America. The latter is expressed in various forms as the idea of moving to rural Belize. By analysing these two kinds of 'dream', I show how looking into these journeys of possible futures reveals different understandings of one's personal experience mediated by wider social conditions. Newly arrived migrants see their experiences as a trial period, open to the possibilities of upward social mobility in a new place where they are experimenting with a new way of life. Workers of Belize City reflect the constraints of urban life in their imaginaries. They also aspire and hope according to their present conditions, experiencing their present as relatively open or constrained in relation to tentative future changes.

6.1 The American Dream

This section begins with the journeys of Jaime and Marvin, father and son. Their accounts are analysed chronologically, moving from the past towards the present, in order to make explicit how past and present are connected and mutually understood in their narratives. I show how life in their native Honduras is seen as a condition of normalized crisis, and how these migrants describe their lives through linking personal circumstances (present) with the context at home (past). Then, I turn to their journeys as they travel towards Belize and 'the North'. I show how travel is an occasion for learning (about different countries and work techniques) and applying one's knowledge. While these physical journeys are understood as particular experiences, they also link past knowledge acquisition with future livelihoods

in the country of destination. These journeys are also understood as steps forward in socio-economic terms. Following the same register used to describe one's home and travel, the possibility of moving forward shows how expectations are evaluated and formulated from the point of view of the experienced past and present. Finally, I take Jaime's insight that his current life in Belize City was an 'experiment', arguing that newly arrived migrants frame their understandings of the future as open-ended, embracing indeterminacy as a constitutive element of their present journey forward.

6.1.1.1 *Jaime*

'I come from a place that hemm... [is] disintegrated, because my father was a real womanizer (*hombre muy mujeriego*). And [in] my country [...] there's a lot of irresponsibility', Jaime explains to me. His early childhood was in a northern coastal city in Honduras, where his mother raised him and his two brothers in the absence of their father. She managed however to send him to elementary school and moved the four to the countryside with their stepfather (a foreman in a country estate).

When eighteen, Jaime moved to the nearby city of San Pedro Sula, where he finished his secondary education before becoming an electrical technician, and started to work and party (*parrandear*). He was planning to marry a university student from his home town, but this changed when he 'got trapped' (*me enredé*) with another woman. His future spouse became pregnant with Marvin, who was born in 1995, followed by two daughters, one and ten years later respectively.

Jaime worked for a private company as an office equipment technician, and later moved back to his hometown to work for a friend, Martínez, who had an office equipment sell-and-repair business. At the time Jaime was struggling to provide economically for his two children. when he started 'to work alone, I start[ed] to feel what it is to ehh... step into the street (*tirarse a la calle*), without capital, only with knowledge. And, well, at least I've

managed to survive, many years. Although I didn't get to establish a little company, [I was] only working just to live, only to pay the rent...'

The couple secured a mortgage and bought a house. This became his 'Achilles' heel', since they started having troubles repaying it. He blamed his wife's lack of financial contribution to the household:

She wasn't working because, firstly because she doesn't have an educational level that is even med...I mean medium, she didn't finish her education, didn't achieve anything... anything that can help her. Then sometimes it's not that, if not the willingness (*disposición*) of the person. And... because...when you want to do something, you do it by any means, right!?

So, Joseph, these economic pressures, and practically the breakdown of my marriage with... my loving relationships with her, led me to make the decision to set a new course (*tomar un nuevo rumbo*).

In 2014, Jaime 'decided to travel' and contacted Martínez – who had moved to Belize five years earlier – in the hope of receiving some help in settling in Belize. His journey however ended in the port city of Puerto Cortez, Honduras, since he was short of money and his older children were finishing college and needed financial help. Yet he was determined to try again a year later, 'suffocated' by personal and national circumstances:

The country was doing well when Manuel Zelaya [i.e. former President] was there, there was disposable income (*circulante*), there was employment. But when Manuel Zelaya leaves power, they throw him off like this, the coup, the country was thrown into turmoil and the economic situation gets more critical, and the work is reduced along with the fact that, the country's economy, so you are left already so suffocated (*asfixiado*) that I can't practically even cover my basic needs, right!?

Unable to contact Martínez again, Jaime tried again to exit Honduras for the first time in his life. He reached Puerto Barrios (Guatemala), where he earned a living repairing typewriters during the day, thanks to his toolbox which he had never left behind. In the night, he worked as a receptionist in a hotel that provided him with lodging.

But I'm always with the idea [of leaving Honduras], I remember that I was going to the lee pier. There is a pier there where they set off, the boats set off from there to Punta Gorda [Southern Belize]. I was spending some time sitting at the lee pier and watching people that were going to Belize.

He realized that the salary was 'enough just to eat' and decided to leave, not before spending the night (and the money) *parrandeando* after a time of hard work. Consequently, the next morning he opted for a cheaper journey over land. When he arrived at the Guatemalan border town of Melchor de Mencos he found himself short of cash and slept in the bus terminal, doing some small repair work the following day.

Crossing the border illegally was the only solution Jaime saw with the meagre resources he had. He also feared having his access denied, and did not want the uncertainty of entering with a tourist visa, without knowing how many monthly renewals he would have been granted. Given that he had no contacts in Belize he asked his daughter to get in touch with a potential Honduran husband-to-be residing in Belize via WhatsApp. This contact brought Jaime from Melchor to Belize City, where Jaime found hospitality in the house of his potential son in law's auntie

Jaime found employment in Belize City as a machinist on the smallest vessel of a marine transport company (or sea freight). It was a time of hard work for Jaime who barely had a chance to leave the boat, but he was earning a good salary. After three months, his employment was ended by an argument

with a captain, just before his son Marvin, whom he had invited to Belize because of his promising earnings, reached the city.

Around the same time, Jaime started a new 'experiment' (*experimento*) – a relationship with his current partner (*pareja*), a health worker from Colombia. He described her stubbornness to not delay their cohabitation because he had lost his job.

the point is eehhh, that maybe, maybe yes, it is possible to achieve a better economic condition here, but it depends on many factors, for example I am still like in an experiment, because I don't know if it was better to stay single or be with a partner, I'm like in an experiment. Because you know that depending on how the couple gets along, the couple can start to move forward (*salir adelante*) and do well.

When Jaime was jobless on dry land, his landlady's husband introduced him to Mr Juan, the contractor.

I talked with him, with *Don Juan* and... I've always come willingly to work in my profession, I'm an electrician, but of course here there's a problem that you must have a permit, a license to work as electrician... and... to do major jobs. But, *Don Juan*, well he opened doors for me, he opened doors and I did little jobs with him, and then he saw that I know how to work as an electrician and he looks for me sometimes.

Jaime then found employment as a security guard during the nights, occasionally doing little jobs during the day to supplement his salary, with the hope of building a small clientele base. 'Slowly, slowly' Jaime was settling into what he now recognizes as his destination:

I understand that the country, this country...is a country to show gratitude to... that still, well for us Central Americans, its is like a way of escaping, because the dream of ours, the Central Americans, is to reach the United States, the American Dream (*el Sueño Americano*). But for many this is impossible, even more for a man like me that is... I'm a fifty-one-year-old man. This is already out of my life's reach, right!? Eehh...because its very difficult to get there, not because I don't still have the ability to work, but I'm already a grown-up man and I don't, don't think that I could put myself at risk in that way [now].

Since he wanted to remain in Belize, Jaime planned to legalize his stay in Belize: 'Now I can't back out, now I don't have a home in Honduras' (*'ya no me puedo echar para atrás, ya no tengo hogar en Honduras'*). However, he sent remittances both to pay his house mortgage (where his ex-wife and their younger child lived) and for his older daughter. He also hoped to reunite with his older daughter:

I tell her to get her passport and come legally, see how we can help her economically, because since she's a young girl, she could get a good little job in a hotel or something. And that she learns a bit of English because this is the other point right!? You come here without talking English and that's a barrier, right!? For instance, I'm an office equipment technician... here there's a lot of cash register's and everything but, since I can't communicate well with people, I can't go and make myself available, eehh all of this... it's a barrier for me, not to know well the market. That's what we are up to.

6.1.1.2 Marvin

Marvin, Jaime's twenty-year-old son, who worked for Juan as a helper (see ch. 4 and 5) tells me about his college education in Honduras:

It taught everything about industry, timber, carpentry, electricity, everything about electricity, structures, welding... yeah... refrigeration, everything about the refrigerator, also electronics, and... yes... it's a good college, they teach well. [...] I finished it, but I had to come and I've never had the opportunity to really work on what I 'd learnt... [...] [laughing] Yes, it doesn't make sense having wasted all these years, this is what happens man... [addressing himself] "so why did you study? If none of this leads anywhere!" [...] I had to work in agriculture, in the fields, and cutting coffee, cleaning, planting ginger, and other things that are done, like corn, and...and...

So, [I wanted to leave Honduras] because of, basically because of the situation of the country, because, so...the crime is terrible, the poverty, the jobs, there are no jobs, basically everything that...

Hem... always... when I was a kid I grew up in a place that was dangerous, right!? But I don't... I was always a shy person, right!? Normal... in my childhood there was a lot of innocence, not like now that there's... there's no, there's no more [innocence].

Dangerous because they want to force you, you have to flee, for example in my case, right!? I had to flee because I want to be neither *marero*¹⁰⁹ nor a criminal. One day I [said], "I'm going, I'm going'. Even if it hurts me because it's my country, it's your country, you feel good, but you get to another country where you don't know anybody, you don't have family, friends. *Bwoy* is hard because at the beginning you want to go back, but this isn't possible because you fear your country.

¹⁰⁹ Member of a *mara*, a kind of gang formation that originated in the United States and spread, especially through the deportation of migrants, in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (see D'aubuisson 2015; Wolf 2014; Does 2013).

Oh so, they [i.e. his parents] didn't believe me, they didn't believe me but they saw that I was truly going [to the USA]... they didn't want to stop me, at the same time they didn't give me anything, *chek*¹¹⁰? [laughing]

Marvin tried once to reach the USA but was deported to Mexico since he entered illegally. On a second attempt, he crossed through Guatemala into Mexico and, taking buses and hitch-hiking, reached the northern border town of Reynosa. His lone journey toward the USA ended when he was kidnapped.

They asked for one thousand five hundred, they would have taken me across [the border] or left who knows where [smiles]. But they had me in a house, let's say like this [i.e. two-storey house], like the one we are in now [], right? There were two rooms, no three, all us men were [in] two, there were women and kids in the other, all [of us] only in one house. [...] *bwoy*, there were enough people, still more were coming... a nightmare, just entering, yess... [the kidnapers were] taking people [in] every day. [...]

So, given the situation that there were a lot of people and well, they weren't taking people out, the... the... how can we say, in Mexico they call them the *guachos* [militaries]. They were passing by frequently, this way let's say [gesticulates], at the border of the highway, they were passing by frequently to see what was happening, and they [i.e. kidnapers] said to keep it down, because it was enough people, I mean they could hear the noise though, [...] something was going on in that road, so they knew that they kidnapped people, so something was going on and... so the neighbours also said, something was going on in this house,

¹¹⁰ Slang word interchangeable with '*you dig?*', are used here to end a sentence with the meaning of 'you know what I mean?' Kriol interjections are a common feature of the spoken Spanish in Belize. I leave them untranslated in *italics* to give an additional sense of Marvin's gradual settling into Belize City in terms of idiom.

there were more than one hundred people... in this house. How can't you hear the noise and all that!? So, one day they [kidnappers] went and left the people alone, so the people... we decided to leave and they [the military] arrived, when we started to get out they arrived *check!*? And they arrived and they took them, how is it called? To the military headquarters, so we slept there, [...] they took us to the airport and they send us to the DF [Distrito Federal, i.e. Mexico City].

[...] Aha, they deported me to Honduras again and I've been like a year, I think, in Honduras again. My father came here looking for a friend, and after six months of him being here I decided to follow him, right!? So... here I am [smiling].

Actually everything changed [after my father left for Belize], because well, I've never thought of coming to Belize, I've never thought, when I was in Honduras I've never thought of coming here to Belize. [...] I've always said that that I wanted to leave the country, go to the United States, Mexico, including Guatemala, I wanted to go to any other place. I've always had this idea, right!? Of leaving Honduras, but I've never taken Belize into consideration, but [...] now... Belize!! [laughs] Not any other place... Belize. [...] Well, actually, if an opportunity would come out, that I could [go to the States], that could be good, right!? But to go just like that, no...

[laughs] I like the country, right!? Economically, compared with some others it's good! It is good, the work, the opportunities. It's hard but there are still chances of doing something [i.e. making a living]. And the women *bwoy!* [both laugh] Lots of women *bwoy!*

Marvin was particularly close to William, who was a good friend and neighbour of Emilio. These were older construction workers (see ch. 4 and 5) who used to be neighbours until Emilio moved with his spouse into the

back of her fast food restaurant. Marvin had been initially living with his father next door to them in the Southside. Then, he moved into a two-storey wooden house in the Northside, where he rented a room on the ground floor. Jaime and his partner occupied one of the six rooms on the first floor which were sublet by the Honduran live-in landlady. The three moved out to have more space when Jaime started to cohabit with his partner and was employed as a watchman. Since Jaime had worked for Juan, he asked the contractor to give Marvin a chance.

The truth is that yeah, I worked [in construction,] but I didn't have much experience, I've only worked like a month, let's say two months [in Honduras]. Here I really... I came here to learn. Now I already know how it is. In the beginning, yeah, it was hard because I didn't know anything, some [employers] fooled me...[...] I went to work with a Honduran that, *bwoy*, fooled me.

Working for Juan he became closer with some of the labourers that 'supported him', and found him jobs, even if he aimed at having a more stable occupation:

Like [with] *Don Juan*, that's not work where you wake up and bum!! You go every day. You already know what to do. [i.e. it is not a regular employment] It's like this with Don Juan: tomorrow I don't know what to do, the work varies [smiles] so... [...] It doesn't give you stability... this kind of job you can't... further on I think of getting a stable job, right!? To better financial situation (*tener una mejor economía*'), it's important, to pay the rent, food...

...and send money to his mother weekly or monthly, depending on his situation.

Marvin also entered Belize illegally, as his father had done, but as for others in his position, a new possibility has opened up:

Well by chance now there is a programme for refugees, the people that came from their countries fleeing from the *maras*, from killings, I don't know... different... each one has a different story of why they came fleeing their country. [...] One goes and they give you a form to fill, to put your age, and present it to the migration office... [...] I have the papers. Let's say that I'm legal, if the migration catches me, I don't have problems.

[...] I can walk the streets with no fear, [...] the only problem is if, if...I don't know what could happen if they catch one while working because it is not for work, it's only to stay here, right!? It's not for work, I don't know what happens if they see me working, they lock me, I don't know exactly... [...] I don't have any problems with the police, because if they ask your papers and you don't have it, they deport you. The problem is if they imprison you for six months... [...] and you fear being imprisoned.

6.1.2 Leaving home *para El Norte*

These narratives ascribe the reasons for migration to the current situation in Honduras. They explicitly referred to the political economy at times through personal circumstances: the difficulty to pay a mortgage, the impossibility to find a job suited to one's education. In particular for Marvin, because of his age, the violence and threat of gang recruitment constituted a crucial factor in thinking about leaving Honduras. Jaime and Marvin, whose generational differences emerge in the different emphases they placed upon problems which affected them, inscribe themselves within the migration flows from Central America towards Belize and the USA (cf. ch. 4).

This migration from Central America to Belize (and North America) is not a new phenomenon (see Introduction). More importantly, for the migrants I

worked with, the feeling of being in crisis is neither novel or nor arises from a sense of radical discontinuity with 'normal life'. For instance, during a brief visit to Belize in June 2018, while chatting with Jaime and Marvin, among others, about the recent political crisis in Honduras following the 2017 elections (see Kinosian 2017; Kinosian and Lakhani 2017; Reuters 2017), Jaime clearly traced a life-long succession of crises: 'As far as I know Honduras has the same problems' (*'Desde que tengo razón Honduras tiene los mismos problemas'*), he said, reeling off a list that included rising energy costs, corruption, military intervention and social welfare conditions. A Salvadoran mason who was sipping beer with us responded that the same was going on in Nicaragua, where the Spring repressions resulted in protesters being killed or disappeared (see *The Guardian* 2018). The father, also a mason, soon after started to recount the negative effects on the cost of living of the substitution of the Colón (the Salvadoran national currency) with the US dollar in 2001. They also agreed that the historically heavy intervention and influence of the United States in the region was a major cause of current and past problems. They described a region-wide crisis that was not a new phenomenon but part and parcel of their everyday experiences, narrated through both personal histories and wider socio-political developments.

Recent ethnographic work on the wake of the 2009 financial crisis has emphasized the relations between current and past crises. Pipyrou (2016) noted how her informants in Southern Italy saw their present circumstances as part of 'a crisis within a longer crisis' (Ibid. 60) and reflect upon them through past critical moments. In Greece, Knight's (2016) informants made sense of the recent financial crisis and austerity measures as becoming chronic by assembling diverse both close and distant recollections of the past. My interlocutors also referred to past conditions, but by hinting at illustrative historical events, referred to a linear history of crisis marked by substantial continuity. The crisis was not something new of which to make sense as it became normal, but something old from which to escape. As I show, the exit from this crisis involved a move out of their countries, towards

the North, and the adoption of an open stance towards their present and future in Belize: experimenting.

If the older migrants stressed continuity through years of crisis, the younger added an emphasis on the problems related to gang recruitment which they had experienced since adolescence and had impacted their lives more heavily. There is the presence of a 'sense of crisis' (Kleist and Jansen 2016, 374 original emphasis) in these accounts of home countries which contributes to shaping understandings of the countries. Belizeans and Central Americans alike characterize Belize¹¹¹ as the exception in Central America for its lack of civil wars, its political stability and steady currency¹¹². The focus in these accounts is on ideas of stability and instability informed by political and economic circumstances (cf. Greenhouse 2002, 9). While not limited to the binary of constant crisis/instability and absence of crisis/stability (which resembles the migration push-pull factors), these elements of regional and international political economy are linked for (and by) the migrants with their own personal journeys. Within an understanding of historically and geographically changing circumstances, these commentaries convey a sense of unexceptional reality. Vigh (2008, 7) has argued for an anthropology that looks at crisis as 'endemic rather than episodic.' (cf. Roitman 2014, 66–67) By looking at chronic and routinized crisis, Vigh proposes to move from crisis *in* context to crisis *as* context, 'as a terrain of action and meaning' (2008, 8), to see the interrelation of the crisis' socio-political and personal dimensions. It is possible to trace the

¹¹¹ The same characterization has been circulating from the time of the 1980's civil wars and the flow of refugees from Central America to Belize, the latter often described as a haven for these migrants (see, for instance: Shoman 1990, 22; Plaisier 1996, 11–12; A. Salazar 2000, 7). Perhaps Costa Rica, arguably another stable country in the region, is not mentioned by Central Americans in Belize because it is not part of the trajectory towards the North, and by Belizeans because relatively far in comparison with Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and even Nicaragua.

¹¹² The Belizean Dollar has a fixed Exchange rate of 2:1 with the US Dollar since 1976 (See Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas 2012, 157–58 for a discussion).

intertwinement of these two dimensions of crisis in the narratives of the journeys of Jaime and Marvin.

In Jaime's journey, the moral understanding of men (the father 'womanizer', the source of 'irresponsibility' in the country) and women (who 'trapped' him, who show a lack of 'willingness') intertwine with the political turmoil in Honduras (the coup) and its financial situation (the lack of 'disposable income'). He felt 'suffocated' by personal and national circumstances. In particular, his mortgage (his 'Achille's heel'), condenses the weaving together of personal and national circumstances: in his view it is a result both of a long relationship with a woman who does not contribute, and the financial situation in the country at large. Marvin similarly reflects upon personal circumstances and nation-wide conditions. His efforts at school are frustrated by scarce employment opportunities, his coming of age (loss of 'innocence') runs parallel to the dangers of gang recruitment.

In addition to this, there are the years-long migratory patterns to neighbouring countries and the USA. Jaime reflects: 'the dream of ours, the Central Americans, is to reach the United States, the American Dream'. Here the 'American Dream' is more 'to reach' the USA, rather than the upward mobility usually associated with it – although the two run in parallel (see section below). However, for the present discussion I want to emphasize the awareness of a longstanding, and normalized, envisioning of a future elsewhere, even for people like Jaime, who is admittedly at peace with the idea that they would not reach 'The North'. On one hand the constant crisis, on the other The North which had been established as a destination because it was seen as a place of opportunity. This is not insomuch as a final destination (though in many cases it is thought as exactly this, cf. ch. 4), but as a point towards which to trace a trajectory. While the source and destination of migration partially reflect specific historical nexuses with personal circumstances, migratory patterns are not understood as resulting from a particularly novel problem.

These individual journeys are understood and framed within national, regional and international circumstances with historic dimensions. Jaime and Marvin describe their experience of living in Honduras with recourse to an economic, political and moral register by which they link these experiences to wider factors. I have framed the context in which these journeys start and the shared destination towards which they are projected as part of a normalized crisis. This allows us to explore what crisis entails for Belize City dwellers in relation to their future. The differentially spatialized perceptions of the city deriving from people's different experiences of it, thus inform their attitudes towards their possible futures in or away from the city. I tackle this issue in the second part of the chapter, while turning now to Jaime and Marvin's spatial movements.

6.1.3 Journeys through space

These are journeys in made up of both failed attempts to reach the destination and finally successful ones to an unknown point of arrival. They follow trajectories from home to The North, although not necessarily in a linear fashion. In these accounts, the importance placed on the journey through space and borders has a particular relevance.

For my interlocutors, travel was an occasion to learn. Crossing through different countries was seen as an opportunity to observe little or unknown places. As they narrated, the journey can be challenging, strenuous or dangerous because of limited finances, illegal border crossings and criminals. Marvin's kidnap reveals the physical threats with which migrants are faced (cf. Holmes 2013). Also, their reflective stances about their journeys are shown in Marvin's comments on his present contentment in Belize and Jaime's reflections about age and 'risk' excluding him from realizing the American Dream. These elements also thus contribute to a learning process. Each new journey is an occasion to apply knowledge gained in the previous one. Marvin travels across Central America, not only learning the danger of the US-Mexico border crossing, but also learning how

to travel through these countries: he wanted to leave mainly to the US but also 'to any other place'. In the case of Jaime, skills were applied during the journey towards the purpose of travelling itself. He carries his toolbox with him: he had 'stepped into the streets' making a living on his own, later 'stepping into the road' with little more than his knowledge. Travel is a source of valued experience and application of knowledge gained in past experiences. For construction workers this can literally mean use and acquisition of the skills of one's trade, acquiring new skills while using the ones they already know.

For the construction worker, movement and the continuous changing of sites means constant learning since it involves participating in different kinds of projects and finding solutions to adapt techniques to space and building blueprints (cf. ch. 2 and 5). To journey around Central America also involves constantly learning how to apply different techniques and use various materials. Workers who before reaching Belize had lived in other Central American countries stressed both the knowledge they applied in order to work in such places and the techniques they learned there. For the builder, the physical journey therefore constitutes a learning journey where skills also are acquired and used on the way to a destination. If learning through moving in the city is a constant acquisition of knowledge (cf. ch. 2 and 5), the same can be said of moving around the region.

The ways in which these journeys are recounted has parallels to the migration stories of Caribbean migrants to Denmark that Olwig (2016) analyses. For Olwig, migrants' accounts are 'narratives of adventure', in which the journey to the destination is an occasion to successfully navigate challenges and a source of important new experiences. Olwig (Ibid.) shows the attraction of new experiences as a motivating factor in migration alongside the improvement of social and economic conditions. For my interlocutors, their journeys also meant a genuine enjoyment of the travel, its novelty and challenges. Also, it meant the possibility of acquiring and using knowledge derived from these experiences, not least in terms of

labouring skills. The journey builds upon the previous livelihood in one's home, by applying known skills, and the future work in the destination, acquiring skills while moving. While moving, I was told, a person has to be mentally focused and willing to try out novel building techniques. These elements are seen as fundamental for any progression in one's trade and life (see below, cf. also § 5.5). The journey between home and destination can be understood as 'adventure' for it is a source of new experiences, in which the migrant plays an active role in moving from a known home (Olwig 2016) towards an unknown destination. It also links home and the future destination through the accounts of learning processes linked to past and present work.

6.1.4 Journeys forward

These are narratives of physical journeys through spaces. They are also journeys that aim at moving socially and economically upward. '*Salir adelante*' or '*Avanzar*' ('Move forward', 'Advance') stand for gaining a better form of livelihood, but also to advance in one's profession or trade. Moreover, they refer to an advancement in relation to one's condition in the home country and within the country of arrival (cf. Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Portes 1997; Suárez-Orozco 2003). In terms of construction work, 'willingness' is the main factor attributed to one's advancement (§ 5.5). An apprentice, if he does not want to be an apprentice all his life, needs to actively demonstrate his skills and be purposeful, within his position, in taking on work that is more demanding and varied than that in which he is already engaged (without being dishonest about his abilities). This attitude must be accompanied by a focused mind, an attentiveness to new and more complex tasks. To have any chance to advance, to move forward, and to earn more as well as becoming more employable, the worker needs to 'focus his mind' ('*poner su mente*') on what he is doing and on what he can learn through observing others doing. Workers emphasize that the one who does not advance either lacks will to apply this mental faculty (i.e. is not interested in trying and pushing himself), or is short of mental capacity in

itself (i.e. is 'stupid' or 'dumb'). *Salir adelante* is an economic, professional and personal engagement in the betterment of one's conditions. This is seen when physical journeys correspond to the acquisition of skills sellable on the labour market; moving across borders is thus already a pathway to moving forward.

More generally, *Salir adelante* is synonymous going '*para/hacia El Norte*' (to/towards The North). Moving North and moving up are simultaneous, distinct yet related elements of improving one's conditions. This constitutes a link between socio-economic and physical movement in migrant's expectations (cf. Hage 2003). Here, I want to emphasize the ongoing, possible and tentative character of these movements. The goal North and forward is akin to what lies beyond what Koselleck calls 'expectational horizon' (1985, 273)¹¹³. 'The horizon is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen.' (Koselleck 1985, 273) Expectation, at the same time personal and interpersonal, directs itself to the unexperienced (what has not been experienced yet): the future. In doing so, experience continuously informs expectation and since the former is accumulated within a temporal structure, it is itself altered by 'retroactive expectation' (Koselleck 1985, 275). Guided by an understanding of one's trajectory, between home/crisis and the North/up, these journeys are a movement towards this horizon. The description of the past is influenced by one's present and their prospects in the future. As Jaime and Marvin move forward, their horizon also moves, their expectations change and their reflection on past experiences is modified. Marvin for instance did not rule out further attempts to reach the USA as he had planned while in Honduras, but is content with his move to Belize. While moving with the horizon, Jaime and Marvin practically engage with their situation, 'attempt[ing] to impose a structure on the contingency of the future' (Irving 2017, 38) through quotidian acts directed Northwards and upwards. I have addressed the nexuses of everyday life, work and sociality oriented according to these

¹¹³ While the notion resonates with Crapanzano's (2004) 'imaginative horizons', Koselleck stresses the experiential as pivotal for the constitution of such an horizon.

plans in chapter 4. Here I wish to emphasize the experiential elements present in these journeys as they are reflected in their narratives and their projections for the future (cf. Pine 2014). The register used to describe past experiences and the experience of travel links past and present through a set of ideas (willingness, attentiveness) while inscribing one's journey within wider conceptions of opportunities and constraints (instability/stability, moving forward, moving North etc.).

Their journeys are not only an account of their past experiences and expectations for the future, they are also impressions of their experience of expectation (Koselleck 1985, 274). They are not only accounts of the past from the point of view of the present, they also provide insights on how the future is envisioned, according to a particular, experientially-formed outlook. I turn now to this part of their journey.

6.1.5 The experiment

exper̄imentum

proof, test; experience.

from Collins Latin Dictionary

experiment, n.

A tentative procedure; a method, system of things, or course of action, adopted in uncertainty whether it will answer the purpose.

An action or operation undertaken in order to discover something unknown, to test a hypothesis, or establish or illustrate some known truth.

from Oxford English Dictionary

Perhaps because of their recent arrival in Belize, Jaime and Marvin's accounts are particularly open-ended. For Jaime, he is carrying out an 'experiment'. Trying to achieve his own desired future, where he hopes for economic and sentimental stability, he consciously embraces the unknown nature of his destination. While recognizing the intersubjective dimension of the term expressed by Jaime (his experiment involving a partner), and

evident also from the familiarity of trajectories shown in chapter 4, I adopt 'experiment' more broadly as a useful term to conceptualize this present state of uncertainty. This is an experience of expectation, conscious of its own horizons and limitations of anticipation, but also made through quotidian practical engagements oriented towards an unknown future.

Jaime does not intend to recall the controlled environment of the laboratory where scientific experiments take place (although experiments vary in the measure of control applied, [cf. Knorr Cetina 1992; Kelly 2012]). He rather alludes to the expected (or desired) yet unknown outcome of practical trial. In other words, Jaime speaks of moving tentatively, by testing, by experiencing. The experiment is therefore made up of attempts structured according to specific ideas and expectations (i.e. hypotheses) but with unknown outcomes¹¹⁴. Within the experiment, the features outlined so far in relation to journeys are implicit: the experiential basis of expectation, the trajectory or goals beyond the horizon, and the attempt to actively structure the future. From the point of view of the object of experience (i.e. one own's present and future), the experiment describes a fragment of experience. It has a past, or beginning, and an envisaged destination: an end. In Olwig's (2016) understanding, drawn from Simmel and Wardle (Simmel 1959[1911], Wardle 1999 in Olwig 2016), 'adventure' is characterized by a beginning and an end, and the end corresponds in this case to a new life, evaluated either positively or negatively, in the destination country. 'Experiments' begin after the end of the adventure 'on the road'. They start with a new sense of settling down. Mar (2005, 336) stresses

the close and volatile relationship between the practical tasks of migrant establishment in a profoundly different place, and the

¹¹⁴ Talking of the experience of experimenting is almost tautological. However, what I wish to stress are the insights gained in framing experience and expectation within the concept of 'experiment'.

struggles to maintain a secure sense of one's capacities in the face of an unknowable future.

This relationship emerges from the multiple meanings given to "settling" (the task of migration) and "unsettlement" (as emotional state)' (Ibid.), by the migrants from Hong Kong interviewed by Mar in Australia. In the case discussed here, emotional 'unsettlement' after the end of the road adventure correspond to the embracing of new experiences on the horizon. The potentiality of unsettlement, while not altogether positive, is expressed in this moment of experimentation which takes place in the (chronologically) later, more open-ended parts of one's journey.

However, rather than being 'uncannily present in moments of crisis' (Bryant 2016, 21), set apart from ordinary time and excluding the possibility of anticipation, an experiment constitutes a time understood as a trial period in one's journey. Uncertainty does not become an absolute threat to imagining a possible future. Rather, it defines the period of trial: the experiment is such because the outcome is unknown – it would not be an experiment otherwise. Moreover, rather than being merely descriptive, to frame this moment in life in the terms of an experiment suggests ways of knowing and understanding one's position with regards to the present and future (cf. Miyazaki 2007). Experiment has both a phenomenological and a methodological aspect. By this I mean that it condenses the experience of expectation at the end of the physical journey, and allows migrants to tentatively reorient their action while moving towards the horizon, keeping an openness to the unexpected as an integral part of this movement.

6.2 The Belizean Dream

I often heard comments about rural Belize amongst inhabitants of Belize City, referring to the village from where they or their parents came. This was also the case for some of my interlocutors in the construction industry. This second section opens with sketches of what the village means for four

workers and two contractors previously encountered in the thesis. These are also reflections about other places which connect present and past. By striving upward and forward, migrants embarked on a physical journey which ended in a new city and country onto which they projected their further hopes and aspirations. The experiment described the openness towards the future as felt in the present as well as a way to orient oneself towards the little known. The village imagery reveals how expectations are framed and influenced by the experience of the city amongst Belize City dwellers. However, their expectations are less open to the unknown than the ones conveyed by the sense of trial in the migrants' 'experiment'. Thus, in thinking of the village in terms of a Belizean Dream, I do not suggest an oneiric property. Instead, I juxtapose the Belizean and American Dreams as commonly framed horizons in an ongoing trajectory made of past and present experiences. The experience of everyday life in both Belize City and Honduras (and the travel through Central America) is reflected in diverse present expectations and orientations towards future possibilities.

I firstly analyse the village for its characteristics as a 'quiet' place. The idealized image of idyllic rural life present elsewhere in the Caribbean is here understood as being generated by the experience of the city (and of the village). Thus, the images of the village are telling of the experience of the city. Following the connection between images of rural life and understandings of the experience of city life, I look at accounts of the village(s) by workers as a place where it is possible to attain a sense of independence, though not social mobility, or where the city's grip is too strong to signify a change in one's livelihood. I then turn on the contractor's associations of rural life and economic investment. The village becomes a place where apply one's entrepreneurship capacity and continue to be one's own boss. I borrow from Jansen (2016, 464), who highlights 'uncertainty of outcome' as a condition for hope. Jansen stresses how people deal with and valorise indeterminacy in relational and historical terms in post-Yugoslav and Europe-oriented Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here, I use indeterminacy in order to understand differing meanings attributed to village life as traceable in

understandings of one's position as dependent or autonomous in the present. Broadly, in the case of workers there is a lack of indeterminacy, as one's future is not seen as too distant from the present, and change is relegated to chance or divine intervention. In the case of contractors, indeterminacy is embraced as the space for future advancement and new business opportunities based on a previous knowledge of the rural.

6.2.1 Village sketches

When **Dylan**, a thirty-five-year-old labourer from Belize City and father of three, was talking about his mother's village in Belize District, where two of his siblings lived, he assumed an idealistic tone:

My village [...] is a very quiet and peaceful place to live. You don't have no worries [there], it's the peaceullest place you could find, you could hear a pin drop at night, you could hear birds singing in the morning, you could hear the sound of every breeze that blows by, it's a beautiful, beautiful place.

For Dylan, the prospect of moving to the village was linked to the idea of quietness compared to the city chaos and violence. He made direct comparisons between 'being dependent from all this people in the city', and the possibility of an independent life in the countryside based on subsistence agriculture. Effectively, any potential move to the village on his part was frustrated by family quarrels over land, and the lack of basic capital. 'If I ever win the lottery', was a phrase that suggested the rather ideal character of a possible move away from the city.

Alex, a twenty-four-year-old man from Belize City, worked for the last fifteen years washing busses for a local company after spending his youth 'hustling'. A year before my fieldwork, he had moved to a village in Cayo district, and commuted to Belize City up to six days a week. He lived in his stepfather's brother's house, near his girlfriend and his mother, and

financially helped the latter to buy medicines for a chronic illness. He enjoyed the village in the mornings when he had to take the bus: 'No one in the village at dat [that] time, only me and di [the] dogs.' Alex's village was 'more quiet, no much noise'. He further elaborated: 'Nobody whan [will] rob yo[u], or shot yo' in the village, while 'here dem wanna [they want to] rob you fi one [for a] little bit of money.' The rural setting allows for tranquillity: 'Ah [I] like it now, da [the] village, ah [I] sleep, eat and smoke.'

John, a thirty-two years old welder from Belize City lived in a house bought by his spouse, a public employee. The pair had a son at elementary school, and John showed me how he had been adding an extra floor of their cement house which was near completion: 'I did everything, you know? I know how to do this. My wife bought this house, and Ah [I] say: "Make I do something inna di yaad [in the yard]". 'I have two stepsons who are big man, they provide for themselves and live in Cayo, so when they come here they have their space'.

He was proud of working independently, doing his 'own thing', as well as being able to do work to his house on his own. Even though he had worked to extend the house where he lived, he stressed to me that he would have liked to go to the village where his family is from, a quiet place in comparison with the city in which he had just recovered from a shooting.

This idea of the village as a possible escape from the troublesome city is not only expressed by born-and-bred Belizeans. **William**, a forty-year-old construction worker, came to Belize City from El Salvador when he was ten with his parents and siblings. He used to tell me stories about his encounters with local thieves and petty criminals, stressing his bravado and luck in getting out of dangerous confrontations. He had neither partner nor children, and moved after his father died to a village in Belize District. He commented to me:

It's quiet (*tranquilo*), people respect me, I don't have to watch my

back when I go to the shop. An I live alone in a house... in the night there aren't noises, you can see the moon and the stars...

While widely appreciated as a peaceful and beautiful place, the village was also a possible place in which to start or expand a business. **Pete** was a contractor in his late forties, father of an eighteen-year-old son and twelve-year-old daughter. From a village in Cayo district, he helped his parents selling food and cultivating land for subsistence before moving to Stann Creek district to work with his father as a carpenter for a citrus company. He moved to Belize City in the early 1990s where he worked as labourer, security guard, collector for a cable company, delivering baked goods and finally as a building contractor. He told me that 'things are slow now', it was difficult to keep up with the raising bureaucratic standards for construction and the availability of the big companies, so he 'have to stay pan de [on the] move too' as much as those who are asking him for work, often looking to be hired by others:

at my tender age of 47, I am deciding to quit, you know, I gat [got] enough too because you know it's too much trouble. Because we have a lot of competition with the... I no call dem [them] aliens but... immigrants coming to Belize.

Indeed, if he had managed to sell his house, he would have happily gone to the USA with his spouse where his brother-in-law would have helped him in settling. At the same time, he was thinking about moving to the village to where his parents had also moved thirteen years ago. They had bought machinery and a van, to farm 'at a better rate' and sell their products at the local market.

Therefore, Pete thought about moving to the village as an alternative to migration to the United States. Changing his area of work from construction to farming, both fields which he knew first hand, was a

tangible possibility for him, and he was realistic about his chances: 'you have to be smart'.

Juan, a fifty-one years old contractor father of two sons in their early twenties, also thought of moving away from Belize City. Tired of the slow market, of working with 'irresponsible people' and because he had been working in construction for twelve years, he would have liked to go to the farm he owned in Cayo district. 'Sometimes you don't see people for days!', he said with satisfaction. Since he had a property in the city, he was thinking of the possibility of opening a coffee or juice shop, where he would process and sell his own produce. He asked me if I wanted to participate in the business. He was aware of how he could have used his current resources to shift from construction to agriculture and catering, while at the same time being aware of the positive 'quietness' of the rural setting.

6.2.2 A quiet place

Man deh Inner City hungry and no eat
And food deh down a country just a drop off a the tree them
You see say poverty no real then
Is what the reasoning revealing

Protoje, *Who Knows*

These sketches show common ideas about and orientations towards village life as well as differences in how people envision a possible future there or evaluate their life in the village. Thus, the village serves as a repository of common images about and a commentary on the city, brings together different subjective ideas, and indexes aspirations. The common denominator between all the images of the village is its quietness. I therefore focus in this section on this idea of the quiet village in terms of its relationship with the city.

Mohammed argues that the 'idea of an idyllic rural Caribbean [...] is a dominant one in the popular imagination of the region' (2000, 199). In what Thomas-Hope calls 'the myth of the city' (1996, 27), urban space is seen as a civilized environment offering opportunity and wealth. However, poverty, lack of employment, crime and poor infrastructure, turn this into a 'counter-myth to paradise.' (Thomas-Hope 1996, 27) This leads at times to 'a revaluation of the countryside, idealized as a peaceful and harmonious, pure and authentic place, where old time values still reign.' (Jaffe, de Bruijne, and Schalkwijk 2008, 7) The city and the countryside mirror each other when their respective dwellers think of their life in reference to the other space, as Thomas-Hope summarizes:

the rural person's belief in utopia as being found in the city is equaled only by the city person's utopia believed to be captured in the tranquility of nature in the rural setting. (1996, 27)

These ideas about city and rural life are common in the Caribbean. For instance, the lyrics of the Jamaican singer Protoje in this section's epigraph contrast the city of hunger with the fruitful country, where the divine 'provide all my wants and needs'¹¹⁵. The imaginary of the village amongst inhabitants of Belize City has various connotations which partially conform to the positively charged attributes mentioned above. Moral ideas attached to the countryside are more ambivalent than the ones positively associated with 'old time values' (Jaffe, de Bruijne, and Schalkwijk 2008, 7), extended family networks and respectable gender normativity (Mohammed 2000). For some, the village retains an idea of innocence, while for others it is a place of family immorality ('incest') and spiritually dangerous practices ('cursed land'). The 'bush gyal' and 'bush man', the women and men from the countryside, are not immune from negative characterizations of backwardness (cf. Johnson 2003, 607-8), a common view amongst urban dwellers elsewhere in the

¹¹⁵ These images are also reflected in popular films. See for instance cult movies such as 'Countryman' (Jobson 1982), where the idyllic rural setting is disturbed only by political inference, or 'The harder they come' (Henzell 1977) with its theme of the naive rural man coming to the city in search of opportunities.

Caribbean towards the 'wild and uncivilized' (Douglass 1992:180 in Khan 1997, 48) country people. The imagery of the village can be contradictory and varied. However, my purpose here is not to give a comprehensive account of Belize City inhabitants and their relationship with places and people in the country. Rather, I wish to focus on the most commonly emphasized aspect of rural life, its 'quietness', and the significance this held for my interlocutors. If the American Dream holds particular relevance in imagined trajectories of Central American migrants, the village can be seen as a Belizean Dream of sorts, for its characterization is partially modelled in relation to the city and constitutes a point from which to trace a trajectory that goes from urban Belize City to the rural village life.

The quietness of the village is evoked through idyllic, if not pastoral, images: the stars, the lack of people and noise, and the silence so pervasive that it is possible to hear a pin drop. The quiet village has a lower population density than the city, it is also less chaotic and crime and violence are not as common. This imagery is not a result of lack of experience of village life. Many either came from a village or their parents did; they may have lived in a village, have family that they visit, or themselves moved to a village from Belize City. It is not an idealization that stems from lack of knowledge of the village, and therefore it is not a utopia strictly speaking. Rather it comes from the same person's experience of both the village and the city. The village is described more or less directly in relation to the city: it stands in dialogic relation to it. It is a space that evokes what the city is not, what it has been, or will be; it is a receptacle of things potentially left behind in moving from the city. The village is quiet because there are no noises nor people to make them, but also because there are not as many problems as in the city. If elsewhere popular understandings positively evaluate a certain sociality of the rural (cf. Mohammed 2000), in this case is the positive loneliness of rural life (being left alone) that is positively contrasted with the urban excess of sociality and its dangers.

Here, I am not addressing the actual life in the village from an ethnographic perspective. Thus, I am not proposing an urban-rural dichotomy for comparative reasons from the perspective, say, of lifestyles and social interactions. Without being prompted by my questions, my interlocutors have often spontaneously made comments on the life in the village, and jointly referred to life in Belize City in a manner which contrasted with the countryside. It is not that villages are actually crime free or free from social and economic inequality (cf. Strathern 1982). However, the poor analytical purchase of the urban-rural sociocultural division, 'does not necessarily lessen its sentimental or imaginative efficacy as an idiom in common usage.' (Rapport and Overing 2007, 361–62) Commentaries about rural life emphasize contrasting features in relation to the life in the city. Therefore, the image of the village reveals how the city is experienced since village life is discursively contrasted by present and former city dwellers with city life.

For John, who was shot a few times in Belize City 'because of the people who live around here' [i.e. people involved in criminal activities], the village is a place of tranquillity from the tensions and threats of the city. Alex expresses similar concerns when talking about his life since he moved back to the village. William also stressed the safety and lack of potential confrontations offered by rural life. His example is also telling of the openness of the village imagery. William, who lived most of his life in Belize City after he fled El Salvador as an adolescent, felt under threat similarly to John and Alex. Rather than being associated with particular ethnic and racial categories (cf. Khan 1997)¹¹⁶, the image of the village is linked to the experience of living in the city, and to one's livelihood within it (more on the latter in the following sections). Thus, when talking about the village as *Belizean Dream*, I do not suggest that it is tied to a sense of national belonging, however defined. Rather, by using 'Belizean Dream' my aim is to

¹¹⁶ I am not excluding that this association operates elsewhere in Belize or the existence of historically stratified discourses that link race/ethnicity with forms of livelihood and rural settings (cf. Johnson 2003, 2005). However, I did not encounter it in the accounts I have heard in Belize City with regards to people's villages, their characterization in contrast to the city or their plans to move to rural areas.

juxtapose it to the American Dream and show the differences between these imaginaries and the experienced reality, however geographically close or distant their physical referents might be.

Therefore, the village is also a place where there are fewer worries related to people and possible confrontations with other people, in which it is possible to earn a living in different ways to the city. Even if the village might take on a mythical or utopian character for the people describing it at times, I am hesitant to follow the literature cited above and categorize it as a myth or a utopia as far as discussing the ways in which it features in my interlocutor's accounts is concerned. Indeed, the village is sometimes discussed in idyllic terms, but it is also an experienced reality. Often a general concept of the village is applied to specific places in my interlocutors' lives. Instead of looking at the village as a myth or a utopia, I treat it as an open signifier. Thus, by writing of the village in the singular, rather than plural, I do not mean to point to a singular geographical entity or idea. Rather, I aim to show how a general idea of rurality is inflected with different meanings. By village as open signifier I mean that while there is a common, positively charged idea of the village (rightly emphasized in accounts that look at the rural as myth or utopia), the village is also a repository of subjective ideas not limited to the idea of the rural idyll which are overlooked if only adopting an encompassing and homogenizing category of myth and utopia. In this sense, the different images of the village evoke the subject's positionalities, priorities and possibilities. The nuanced inflections of what this quietness means, along with other elements ascribed to the village, are constantly changing according to subjective experiences. The village as a repository of quietness signifies something different for different people, who add, amplify or decrease certain aspects. This discussion of the village therefore offers a further angle from which to understand how Belize City is seen by its inhabitants (cf. §§ 2.4, 4.6). Different experiences of the city are reflected in the idea of the village, which is telling of the kind of possible future subjects envision for themselves, or of the ways in which they read their presents in connection to the past in the city. It is possible to trace two

main themes present in the evocation of village life. The first is its quietness, a shared sense of tranquillity which I have explored in detail so far. The second involves the ways in which the village offers a different kind of livelihood. I turn to this second element now.

6.2.3 Independence

Dylan described an idea of village life as self-sufficient in contrast to a life of dependency in the city¹¹⁷. The imagery is not meant to suggest social and economic mobility. Rather, it is a place where autonomy can be attained. As seen in chapter 2, the movement and diversity of economic activities of those who catch and kill reproduces social immobility. While these men are conscious that they are actively seeking out their own means of subsistence, there is a sense of being constantly dependent on someone else's good will to obtain it: contractors, possible buyers, politicians, kin, generous passers-by. In Dylan's dream of future village life, he is not socially mobile, not becoming wealthier *per se*¹¹⁸. Rather, he is able to eat what cultivates, he does not depend on someone else's will to survive. To return to the lyrics in the epigraph, if fruits fall from the trees in the country and are free to pick, in the city I have heard bitter remarks about wealthy residents who preferred their mangoes to go rotten rather than allowing poorer neighbours to pick

¹¹⁷ In Belize, historically the interior was a place of forced labour as well as opportunities for freedom. The slaves working in small crews in mahogany camps were more likely to escape (in this case towards Spanish territory) than when in Belize City (then Belize Town) or compared to other slaves working in plantations elsewhere in the Caribbean (the fact was of great concern for slave owners at the time [Bolland 1977]). The rural lifestyle also represented independence after emancipation for Creoles and Garifuna (Johnson 2005), and the colonial administration legally discouraged landholding for it would have severed the supply of wage labour (Johnson 2003; on land tenure see Moberg 1997, 1–6; Bolland and Shoman 1977). More broadly, the rural interior has been a locus of independent communities of runaway slaves (maroons) from the colonial center in Belize (Bolland 2003, 46, 72–73) and more generally in the pre- and post-emancipated Caribbean (e.g. Lowenthal 1961, 4–5; Besson 2015; Price 2015; Carnegie 1987b).

¹¹⁸ Here I am analysing how imageries reflect an experience of the present, I do not mean to limit the actual possibilities of the future (Dalsgaard and Frederiksen 2013).

them. Even when food is free, some people only have access to these things based on the good will of others.

However, the actual move to the village does not necessarily correspond to becoming more autonomous. Alex, who lived in the village and enjoyed its quietness, reflected that his 'Is still a ghetto life but Ah [I] stay righteous.' He still lived 'one day at the time', and saw 'no way from here', being able to find different or better employment was only possible 'If ih drop inna my hand..' ('If it drops into my hand...'). In a sense, escaping from the grip of the city is difficult, and understood as outside one's control. In the case of Dylan, a lack of social mobility even excludes him from dreaming of the village, his focus is on becoming independent. Moving to the village itself can be seen as out of reach, only attainable through unexpected and fortuitous events ('if I win the lottery'¹¹⁹), which are very unlikely to happen. These expressions of deferral to the improbable and the fortuitous run parallel to a similar fatalistic orientation that leaves the future to God's will and knowledge ('If God wants', 'Only God knows'). I do not wish to conflate these two, chance and divine will, for their relevance in terms of human agency. I am more interested in looking at these expressions as recognitions of the little influence that one has over the possibility of attaining a future different from the present. The sense of dependency and immobility transpires from commentaries about the 'system' designed to reproduce poverty, or as at times phrased the continuation of slavery days. At the same time, the slavery imagery is evoked in remarks about the condition of 'mental slavery', in the sense that Belizeans are trapped in a mentality according to which their livelihood is owed to them (see § 1.2.2 for a discussion of the slavery vocabulary). These expressions convey a sense of

¹¹⁹ One has to play four numbers in the 'lottery', while the 'Boledo' lottery draw which takes place every week day consists of two numbers and the prizes are much lower. The probability of winning the first are exponentially lower when compared to the latter: winning the lottery is so improbable to be close to the impossible, while winning the Boledo is an everyday practice of many Belizeans to make up their wages through luck (cf. Bradley 1973).

frustration and the impossibility of exercising any control in the formulation of an elsewhere or future.

From these ideas, another sense of constant crisis emerges. It finds expression in the slave imagery¹²⁰ (its continuation both in contemporary forms of livelihood and exploitation) and in mental terms (as an attitude towards the world and others). While the notion of 'experiment' leaves space for future advancement and embracing an indeterminate future Northwards and upwards, accounts of the village do not allow for a sense of moving forward. The lack of indeterminacy found in city life limits hopes and aspirations in the village.

This should not be mistaken with an impossibility or inability to imagine. Wardle shows how within severe social conditions, it is possible for ordinary Jamaicans to pursue the meaning of freedom through 'imaginative displacement' which 'mirrors a practical experience of movement' (Wardle 1999, 534). Fumanti's (2016) work with young artists in the post-apartheid Namibian context shows how imagination opens possibilities of freedom. Imagination, through an intentional engagement with the real, that is a conscious signification of an imagined world, entails 'the capacity to relocate oneself in the world beyond the constriction of the real.' (Fumanti 2016, 125–26) Indeed, experience and imagination are deeply linked, also through memory (see Casey 2000; Warnock 1980) and my aim is not to argue for a severing of the faculty of imagination based on experience. Neither do I want to suggest that the village is the main, much less only, place imagined by my interlocutors in the construction industry or inhabitant of Belize City. By taking into considerations the commonly evoked images of the village, my aim is to look at how the commonalities and differences between my interlocutors can be traced back to how life in the city is experienced, or how

¹²⁰ On a separate note, Madeline expressed to me this sense of unchanging future while talking about her relationship with Dylan: 'You see? I have two daughters from Dylan, Tina has a son [from him] and I have a son [from another man] too...*that's a circle!* ('Yu si? Ah hav too daata fan Dylan, Tina hav wahn son, an Ah hav wahn son tu...*dat da wahn serk!*') (cf. ch. 3).

it was experienced by those who effectively moved to the rural and describe it using a similar register, and how these images account for an experience of expectation around how the future might be different from the present. The migrants' experiences of embracing the unknown are substantially different from the sense of continuities between the present and the future that emerge when workers and contractors talk about the village.

Thus, it is not the faculty of imagining that is affected by the lack of indeterminacy. Rather, it is the aspirations and hopes of social mobility projected in the imaginary surrounding the village that are limited. Both the 'capacity to aspire' (Appadurai 2013, ch. 9) and 'hope' (Hage and Papadopoulos 2004) are argued to be unevenly distributed within society. The village as an open signifier indexes the differential distribution of these hopes and aspirations.

It is possible to see from the village as open signifier that frustration with the conditions of life in the city can be so high as to limit one's aspirations for what it would be possible to achieve in the village. One's positionality in socio-economic terms is seen as too limiting to allow significant action, the only way out is chance or God's will. While 'the normalisation of crisis leads to [...] the imagining of lives elsewhere' (Vigh 2008, 15–16, cf. 2009, 99), at least for Central Americans who leave for *El Norte*, for poor Belize City inhabitants it can lead to the circumscribing of one's hopes and aspirations.

For migrants, physical mobility runs parallel to 'existential' mobility (Hage 2009, 98). The latter is an 'imagined/felt movement' (Ibid.): 'when a person feels well, they actually imagine and feel that they are moving well.' (Ibid.) The migrant is physically mobile because he is pursuing existential mobility (*tomar un nuevo rumbo*, in Jaime's words). For Hage, 'as there is an imaginary existential mobility, there is an imagined existential stuckness' (Ibid. 99), a sense of 'going nowhere' which is becoming increasingly

normalized in the current situation of permanent crisis¹²¹. If Central Americans feel a constant sense of crisis because of instability in their home countries, Belizeans refer to a sense of crisis because of the lack of change. However, just as for the Central Americans, this crisis is not perceived as a novel phenomenon: it is a normal¹²² lack of change. This sense of stagnancy, ranging from the societal to the psychological, is evident in propositions about slavery and inflects the imagined futures of which the village is a possible one.

6.2.4 Opportunities

The sense of stuckedness just outlined emerges as only one of the possible outcomes in treating the village as an open signifier. The village can also represent a possible avenue for starting a business venture¹²³. The means to invest in land render the village not only a quiet place but also a profitable one. Juan and Pete recognized the difficulties present in working in construction at the time of fieldwork. For both, the village and agriculture were a place and activity in which to invest and change their current way of making a living. Therefore, this imagery of the village, which has an idyllic character evoked in different ways, is also influenced in its formulation by the conditions and possibilities available to subjects differentially positioned socio-economically, in particular within the hierarchy of the construction industry.

For contractors, the autonomy in moving and working means a degree of freedom and the recognition of being your 'own boss'. A slow market might

¹²¹ This sense of being stuck recalls other commentaries about Belizean 'stasis' in social and political terms (See Iyo and Rosberg 2002; and Cocom 2014).

¹²² In the sense of mostly present, rather than ought to be (Vigh 2008, 11).

¹²³ Alongside the possibility of financially investing in land, access to land is voiced as difficult and problematic issue in Belize. Indeed, access to land (mostly state owned) is tied to the recommendation of political representatives and necessitates knowledge of national regulation which applicants might lack (GOB and CDB 2011, 289–90, 139–43; Bolland and Shoman 1977 for a historical overview).

suggest a possible exit from the construction industry in order to invest in other kinds of endeavours. The village is a place where these possible future investments are projected. Thus, Juan and Pete see that they might be able to move upward (or at least prevent the weakening of their enterprises), taking advantage of more profitable business niches and eventually relocating to the village. Theirs is a continuation of their business. On the contrary, for workers, and especially day labourers, the volatile occupational conditions and the constant search for opportunities rather suggest dependency. The indeterminacy which underlines the investment practices of contractors as businesspeople, and is constitutive of their feeling of independence, also allows them to see the rural as a place of further economic venture and diversification.

To conclude, this chapter's final section has explored the shared and diverging hopes and aspirations as indexed by looking at the village as an open signifier. 'Quietness' is a generic feature of village life, the main element stressed in relation to the rural imagery. It is a barometer of what the chaos of the city life means for its dwellers. Moreover, on a basic level, access to land and wealth influence the imagination of rural life. Moving to the country can mean a continuation of 'ghetto life', a sense of independence or investment in agriculture. Furthermore, livelihood and the values associated with it (cf. ch. 1) shape the village imaginary in addition to the ideas about economic opportunities. One's view of himself as dependent or his own boss in the present translates in a different capacity into aspirations and hopes for the future.

Conclusion

In the first section of this chapter I have analysed the journey of two migrants living and working in Belize City. Their narratives are framed by ideas that link their experiences of personal journeys and the wider conditions within which they inscribe their trajectories. These are present in their accounts of their lives in Honduras, their travel to Belize, and their

understanding of present and future conditions. The unstable home, the American Dream of moving upward, the aspiration to move forward, and the relative stability of Belize, are points of reference within these trajectories.

By framing their present as 'experiment', I have stressed the open-ended and tentative character by which my interlocutors understood their present and future. Thus, experimenting as embracing indeterminacy is a particular moment in their journeys in which they are open to the possibility of moving forward in their lives, towards new experiences, through the 'willingness' and 'attentiveness' that is necessary in life and work.

In the second part of this chapter, I looked at sketches of the journeys in the future of workers from Belize City. I focused on the place the village plays in these imaginaries. Looking at the village as open signifier and point of a future trajectory, I have stressed its relationship with present experience. Firstly, it reflects the experiences of the city, for 'quietness' is a widely appreciated quality of village life. Secondly, it shows how one's position as dependent or autonomous is expressed not only in different ideas of oneself in the future, but itself limits hopes and aspirations of what one can achieve in the future. In particular, the idea of stuckedness (following Hage) emerges from fatalistic accounts about one's changing circumstances and with reference to the slavery imagery. While for migrants the normalized crisis at home is an outcome of instability, for Belizeans who feel dependent the normalized crisis is a result of stable, unchanging conditions.



Figure 13 Village road

Conclusion

Limitations

I outline the principal limitations of this thesis before turning into its main themes, arguments, and contributions. As any ethnographic enquiry, it is unavoidably partial as it is a product of my interactions with a specific set of people within a specific time. I have also privileged a close exploration of the lives of a few workers. In particular, I have followed two of them: Dylan and Javier. However, I believe that this thesis can shed light on wider aspects related to life and work in Belize City and contribute to the ongoing discussions on a variety of issues which I detail below. Over the course of this conclusion, I show how this thesis opens up space for further enquiry and suggests possible future research venues.

The thesis has been limited to the small-scale construction industry due to the access I was able to gain in the field. On one hand, this means that it does not account for larger-scale projects, which employ a higher number of people, grant more chances for continuous employment, are based upon more complex organizational patterns of labour, and are under more control of state authorities. On the other hand, this focus adds an angle on small firms to the ethnographic literature on the construction industry which has been mainly concerned with larger-scale projects.

The thesis features mainly male perspectives on work. On one hand, it could not be otherwise since the focus of this research is on construction work, a sector in which no women are employed in Belize. On the other, I have also included women's perspectives in the thesis since its focus is not confined on the worksite. This picture is strongly partial as the time I spent with women, and the access I had to their lives was considerably more limited than the one I had with men. Moreover, female interlocutors feature mainly in relation to men: as partners, sisters, nieces, and daughters of builders. Nonetheless, I believe that I have shown how these women are economic

actors, central in the everyday life and aspirations of the builders with whom I primarily worked.

Other themes and perspectives have been excluded from the thesis as a result of methodological and temporal limitations during fieldwork and the limits imposed by the length of the text itself. In particular, I have hinted at the relevance of politics for my interlocutors, while a deeper analysis of this theme would require more space than is available here. The men featuring in this thesis are between their early 20's and their 50's. Research on older men is needed, in particular because the physical stress by which construction work affects the body has important consequences for their reliance on work in the sector.

In writing about Central American migrants, I have emphasized perspectives of Hondurans, a growing nationality in terms of migration to Belize, while giving less extensive accounts of nationals from El Salvador and Guatemala. Being adjacent to Belize, Guatemalans engage in seasonal and temporary migration to Belize. My analysis does not take this phenomenon into consideration because I did not establish sufficiently deep ties with people involved in this migratory flux during my fieldwork. Moreover, Guatemalans have a peculiar position in Belize because of the longstanding discord between the two nation-states. How this situation impacts the life and work of Guatemalan nationals in Belize City would require a lengthier discussion which I could not develop because the word limit of the dissertation. Beyond personal circumstances, Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans have their own specificities related to their national status. Yet, I believe that they all have similar concerns in terms of their reasons for migrating and their integration into the Belizean labour market as well as their experience of living in Belize City.

Outline of thesis

The central aim of this thesis has been to explore how different people inhabit the same city and the same occupational sector. I have framed this enquiry around the theme of work. Starting from an analysis of social relations strictly pertinent to labour, and the social, personal and economic differences they entail, I have extended this enquiry to show how life and work are articulated for men working in the small-scale construction industry in Belize City.

Each chapter has contributed to this understanding by adopting a different ethnographic and analytical angle. In chapter 1 I have laid out how skills impact hierarchical relationships between workers and with contractors, and are central for occupational mobility, relations of production, and flexible employment. I have demonstrated the pervasiveness of an epistemological frame centred around autonomy and dependency, exploring this frame in relation to the social and personal worth of work. In chapter 2, I have privileged the perspective of day labourers and their effort in making a living both through and outside of wage work. By looking at 'catch and kill', I have demonstrated the nexus between different economic activities as they situate labourers within the social milieu of Belize City. In chapter 3, I have shown how conditions of economic scarcity underscore dependency upon relatives and non-kin in one's vicinity. Through a close ethnographic account of relationships, I have untangled how different forms of dependability are managed in practice according to various economic and affective understandings. In chapter 4, I have explored workers' sociality beyond the worksite, demonstrating its interrelation with employability and labour relationships. In adopting the point of view of a worker and his wife, I have shown how the creation of ties with workmates and friends intersects with familial migratory trajectories and workers' negotiations with relatives outside Belize. In chapter 5, I have ethnographically returned to the worksite to account for how autonomy is expressed while working and how it is negotiated in terms of mutual dependence. I have explained how

commonalities and differences are navigated in practice while working, and how common values are entangled in the kind of work in which builders are involved. In the closing chapter (6) I have connected present and past expectations and livelihoods with ideas about possible futures. By juxtaposing the American Dream of Central American migrants and the long-term city dwellers' Belizean Dream of rural life, I have elucidated how the present experience of working and living in the city is reflected upon and reflected in orientations towards the future.

Ethnographically, I have constructed this thesis around movements within and beyond the worksite – reaching into everyday social life and as far as narratives of migration. Analytically, I have foregrounded different issues in each chapter as they arose from the ethnography. Five distinct, yet mutually related, themes or topics run across the thesis providing an answer to how my interlocutors inhabited Belize City and all worked as construction workers: work, work and life, the city, movement, autonomy and dependency. I expand on each of them below while recapitulating the broad contributions of this thesis (which I have already detailed in the Introduction).

Work

This central focus of this thesis has been on work. The men whom I had encountered in fieldwork were all working in the same industry, and all the builders recognized themselves as construction workers and producers. I have shown how this recognition is nuanced according to skills possessed: in the more obvious identification with a trade, in the recognition of one's labour through the different ways of looking at its products, in the mutual endorsement of certain values ('working hard' and according to one's capacity, non-authoritarian attitude based on respect, 'willingness' to work and learn, fearless inclination). These similarities do not erase national ethnic and racial differences, but I argue that they hold a stronger place than the former in terms of analysing labour relations.

Within the tradition of research in agriculture and commerce and more recent trends focused on manufacture and the third sector within the Caribbean, the thesis' intervention is aimed at opening up space for further enquiry into non-industrial manual work.

Work and life

I have looked at the articulation of work and life by ethnographically moving in and out of the worksite. This oscillation has allowed me to analyse the importance of social relationships between workers beyond how they can be observed on the construction site. Relationships between workers which are based on mutual respect and acquired status serve flexible production in the workplace and inform friendly gatherings outside of it which foster collaboration and information flows beneficial for finding employment. These kinds of relationships are observable between skilled workers, and between skilled workers and helpers. The transmission of knowledge does not only happen in terms of manual skills in the worksite, but also in terms of knowledge of the sector outside of it.

Skilled workers tactically negotiate relations with contractors on site. This is based on a mutuality of interest in terms of status and employment between tradesman and contractor. Such relationships are strengthened out of the workplace and impact labour relations. By contrast, unskilled workers are cut out of informal apprenticeship and their interests are not shared by contractors. They do not participate in the same kind of collective sociality out of the workplace as skilled workers and contractors; their relationships are played out circumstantially with people dispersed in the city. They are also cut out from practices which facilitate stability of employment. In order to make ends meet, they have to constantly look for other avenues of earning a living.

The preceding pages have offered a contribution to anthropology by focusing on the centrality of personal relationships in a context of informal work,

exploring the nexus between wage work and other forms of income. The thesis offers an angle on the relationship between work and the urban environment in the context of a small city, exploring the ways in which sociality, production and movement mutually shape work and life.

The city

The thesis has provided an outlook of Belize City from the perspective of those living and working within it. Construction workers recognize that they materially produce the physical environment of the city. For long-term dwellers, the relationships established over time and their identification with specific areas mean a constant sense of vulnerability and danger. I have shown how this entails specific vigilance and male body disposition and, conversely, how it is discursively absent in their accounts of village life. For recently arrived migrants, the city is less dense in relational terms. They are also less threatened because of this relative anonymity; thus, they feel safer than in their home country from where they fled violence. However, those who are not legally in the country fear of being arrested and imprisoned. Therefore, the thesis aims to stimulate reflections on how Belize City is “lived” and inhabited by its poorer inhabitants beyond a popular and scholarly focus on involvement in crime. This has included an analysis of migrants’ life in Belize City with the aim of suggesting multiple viewpoints by which Central Americans understand their reasons to move to Belize and experience their life there.

I have also shown the role of consanguineal and affinal ties in socially locating these workers. When relatives are near, they form part of daily life, and relationships with them are mediated through efforts in ‘distancing’ and ‘closing’. Affines, one’s offspring and that of one’s siblings, are central in mediating these relationships. Central Americans who arrived as adolescents in Belize City emphasize their attachment to Belize in terms of their children, born or raised there. Those who arrived recently often try to reconstitute their core family or take their offspring with them. Moreover, loving

relationships become experimental grounds linked to a new start in Belize City. Their relationships with kin at home are multiple, and those who pursue to migrate again to the US also plan to reunite with family there.

Thus, these men participate in the social life of Belize, and also that of other countries, through partners and siblings, but they do intergenerationally: as sons, fathers and uncles. The thesis enters a conversation with Caribbean kinship debates by exploring men's multiple positionalities and their practical engagement with relatives across generations in an urban context. With the same accent on the relationship between city and kin, the thesis enters into dialogue with anthropological insights about migration, considering migrants' active building of relationships within the place of arrival (in this case Belize City itself), integrating them carefully into the navigations of relationships between kin in other countries.

By including family ties in the analysis, I have shown another aspect of the worth of work in personal and social terms. Day labourers who struggle to make ends meet are in a precarious and often painful condition as their fatherhood is defined partially by their ability to provide for their children. This has repercussions on the extent to which they are able to spend time with their children, creates tension with their children's mothers, and entails negative evaluations about their role as fathers. Skilled workers who can access a more reliable, higher income are able to provide for their families with more stability. For immigrant fathers, this constitutes a means to partially fulfil their intentions to better their lives and the lives of their close family members. These men, having their family dispersed across borders, can negotiate relationships with kin with more ease than those whose relatives are with them in Belize City.

Movement

I have shown that an ethnography which looks at the phenomenological and biographical aspects of movement contributes to an analysis of an actor's

position within the city. Firstly, I have shown how movement within Belize City is tied to one's history of living within it. In looking at 'catch and kill' I have shown that navigating the city depends upon knowledge of its social milieu though skilful (but not saleable on the labour market) anticipation of opportunities and evasion of danger. Those who are able to count on work in construction are less reliant on this knowledge in motion for their livelihoods. A shared sense of danger nonetheless pervades the lives of long-term city dwellers, as I emphasized in the last chapter.

Next, I have shown the importance of looking at the nexus between the impressions of the city established amongst its long-term inhabitants and the initial perception of this space amongst newcomers. Migrants cannot look for avenues of earning based on a biographical relation to the urban milieu made up of dispersed and dense social ties. They form relationships starting with co-workers. This also means that they move in the city (partially) without having to navigate dangers related to long-term residency in the city. However, movement is felt to be potentially dangerous as encounters with police can lead to imprisonment due to legal status.

I have pointed out how movement is intrinsic to construction work. This relates to the changing worksites as well as the evolving nature of individual workplaces, and is one of the factors which influence the specific organization of construction work and makes autonomous relations possible within it. Taking movement as analytical axis leads me to note differences in skills from another perspective. Skilled workers move to worksites *following* work. Day labourers move with more frequency *to find work*. Contractors see themselves as *being moved* by the market. For day labourers and contractors, movement fosters social relationships useful for work. For workers, moving in the city entails recognizing or reading their labour in the physical contours of the urban space. Thus, the personal worth of work is expressed and felt in the everyday, and not confined to work practices alone.

I have focused on the ways in which migrants actively relate to each other and establish themselves in Belize City rather than emphasizing their transient and multiple belongings. Thus, I have focused on movement as an aspect of migration, rather than migration as essentially movement. I have shown how journeys across borders are occasions to learn and apply one's knowledge about travelling and working.

By taking seriously the parallel movement Northward (towards the USA) and upward (in socio-economic terms) as described by my interlocutors, I have argued that migrants adopt an open stance towards movement: being open to what will come in the future, and where the hopes for this future will be realized. While accounting for the constraints which migrants undergo and themselves recognize, I have also framed their sense of movement in terms of the connections of their present achievements (fruits of past movements) with their expectations for future mobility.

Autonomy and dependency

The thesis has inscribed a discussion of work within wider understandings of the relative value of autonomy and dependency in Belize. I have shown how these are used by my interlocutors to understand their respective occupational positions. In turn, I have adopted them to analyse the relationship between the worksite and the wider social milieu. Following workers' distinctions between entrepreneurial and productive work, I have traced the fundamental distinction between the former as autonomous and the latter as dependent. Amongst workers, autonomy within labouring practices is based on the extent to which contractors depend on their work. Workers themselves are more or less autonomous depending on their skills, since contractors rely more heavily on skilled labour. Day labourers, on whom contractors are less dependent, are the least autonomous in the worksite and in terms of labour relations. In juxtaposing movements of contractors and day labourers I have shown how mobility within the city signals autonomy for the former and dependency for the latter, serving both

the search for work and the development of economically significant relationships.

I have expanded the discussion on autonomy beyond work relationships. This has allowed me to show the salience of this concept as encountered in quotidian discourses in Belize City, which link labour relations with the wider relational and reputational position of the worker. Understandings based on positive evaluation of one's autonomy are also nuanced by subject's identity in national and ethnic terms. Belizean citizens feel a sense of dependency spanning across the political and national realm. Belizeans of African descent in particular stress views that link past slavery with contemporary attitudes toward, and experiences of, work. Moreover, Belizeans stress autonomy as an end in itself, 'being your own boss', while Central Americans stress it as a means, having your own business in order to have a better livelihood. Thus, I have complicated this pair of terms for the differential epistemological values that they hold for subjects, and their valorisation in terms of desirable positioning.

Day labourers, integrating income from the construction industry with 'hustling,' feel constantly reliant on others' good will for their livelihoods. With kin in the city, this creates tension as resources vital for survival endangers amical relationships. Those who are unskilled, and rely on various means of survival while not engaging in criminal activities, are cut out from both work-related and street-wise status. Skilled workers have more stable incomes which lessens their reliance on kin and on wageless work. They can claim a stronger occupational identity which is linked to their sense of respect, earned, recognized and reproduced on site. They also have some avenues for working at piece rate, and it thus becomes possible for them to be their own bosses some of the time.

Thus, in tackling the issue of the personal and social worth of work, I have demonstrated that autonomy and dependency are useful analytical lenses by which to understand how casual and flexible employment in the

construction industry shapes particular economic strategies and permits differential understandings of one's condition. Using autonomy as guiding principle, permits us to formulate a connection between relations of production, socio-economic life beyond the workplace and individual actors' understandings of how these factors impact their life, rather than equating casual employment and precarity. This is possible, I believe, by taking seriously subjects' own understandings of their social and economic conditions and applying them in order to offer an analysis which accounts for their work, everyday life and aspirations.

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Figure 14 Construction is vital for...



Figure 15 ...the life of the city

Appendix

Belizean Kriol writing system.

Adapted from (Crosbie et al. 2007, 10–14). For detailed information, see (Decker 2013) and (*YOU Can Read and Write Kriol* 2010).

Table 2 Summary of sounds and symbols of BK

Kriol letter	Sound equivalent in English (example words in brackets)
a	similar to <i>a</i> in <i>father</i>
aa	like above but drawn out for longer
ai	<i>ai</i> [<i>aisle</i>], <i>i</i> [<i>icon</i>], <i>ie</i> [<i>lie</i>], <i>igh</i> [<i>sigh</i>], <i>y</i> [<i>why</i>], <i>iCe</i> [<i>bite</i>]
ay	<i>ay</i> [<i>ray</i>], <i>ai</i> [<i>pail</i>], <i>aCe</i> [<i>lake</i>], <i>a</i> [<i>angel</i>], <i>igh</i> [<i>eight</i>]
ch	<i>ch</i> [<i>chain</i>] NOTE 'c' never used alone, only in the 'ch' combination.
e	'b' [<i>bed</i>]. NOTE 'h' added when it appears at the end of a word.
ee	<i>ee</i> [<i>peel</i>], <i>ea</i> [<i>peal</i>], <i>eCe</i> [<i>mete</i>], <i>ie</i> [<i>relieve</i>], <i>ei</i> [<i>receive</i>], <i>eo</i> [<i>people</i>], <i>ey</i> [<i>key</i>], <i>ay</i> [<i>quay</i>], <i>i</i> [<i>ski</i>].
j	<i>J</i> [<i>jacket</i>], <i>g</i> [<i>cage</i>].
k	<i>k</i> [<i>kit</i>], <i>c</i> [<i>cap</i>], or <i>ck</i> [<i>peck</i>]
n	<i>n</i> [<i>nail</i>], <i>kn</i> [<i>know</i>]
o	'short o' sound: made by rounding the lips more than in English
oa	<i>o</i> [<i>open</i>], <i>oa</i> [<i>boat</i>], <i>oe</i> [<i>toe</i>], <i>oCe</i> [<i>note</i>], <i>ow</i> [<i>crow</i>], <i>ough</i> [<i>though</i>], <i>eau</i> [<i>plateau</i>], or <i>oh</i> [<i>oh</i>].
oo	<i>oo</i> [<i>broom</i>], <i>oe</i> [<i>shoe</i>], <i>uCe</i> [<i>cute</i>], <i>ue</i> [<i>blue</i>], <i>ew</i> [<i>blew</i>], <i>ui</i> [<i>fruit</i>], or <i>ough</i> [<i>through</i>].
ow	<i>ow</i> [<i>cow</i>], <i>ou</i> [<i>out</i>], or <i>ouCe</i> [<i>house</i>].
s	<i>s</i> [<i>sun</i>] or 'soft c' [<i>face</i>].
u	<i>U</i> [<i>put</i>] or as <i>oo</i> [<i>foot</i>].
ahn ehn ihn ohn	Nasal vowels

Statistical overview of the construction industry

Table 4 Workers (main employment construction) by District, Ethnicity and Country of Birth

		Total	Corozal	Orange Walk	Belize	Cayo	Stann Creek	Toledo
Ethnicity	Creole	2180	35	31	1807	53	254	0
	Garifuna	873	32	0	164	150	482	45
	Maya	766	0	0	240	86	109	330
	Mestizo/Hispanic	6770	1062	1325	2255	1396	582	151
	Other	554	71	111	192	89	0	91
Country of Birth	Belize	8628	1063	1265	3613	1080	1130	477
	Guatemala	1102	52	55	368	440	85	102
	Honduras	527	40	24	295	0	131	37
	Other	886	45	122	382	254	83	0

Chart 3 Workers (main occupation construction) by District and Place of Birth (SIB 2015)

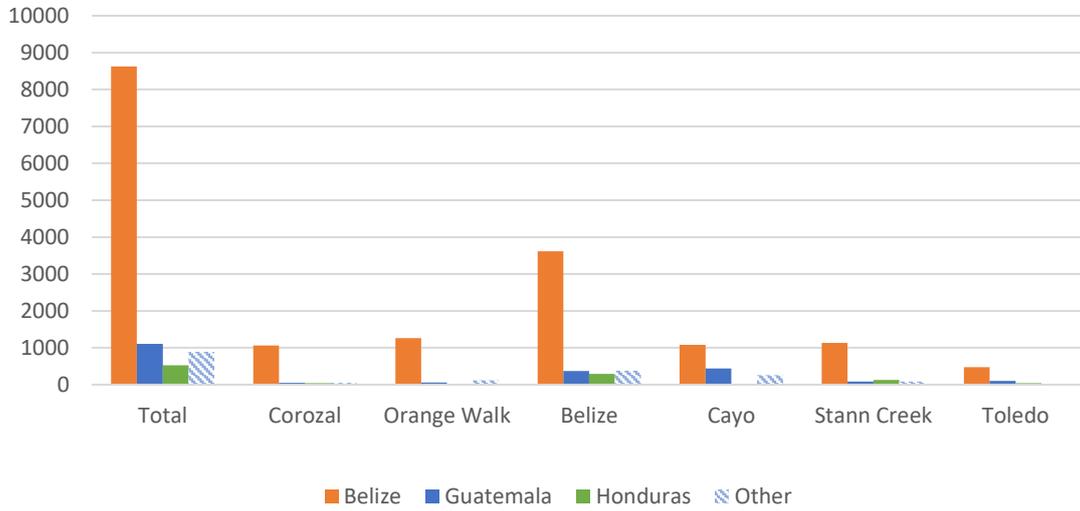
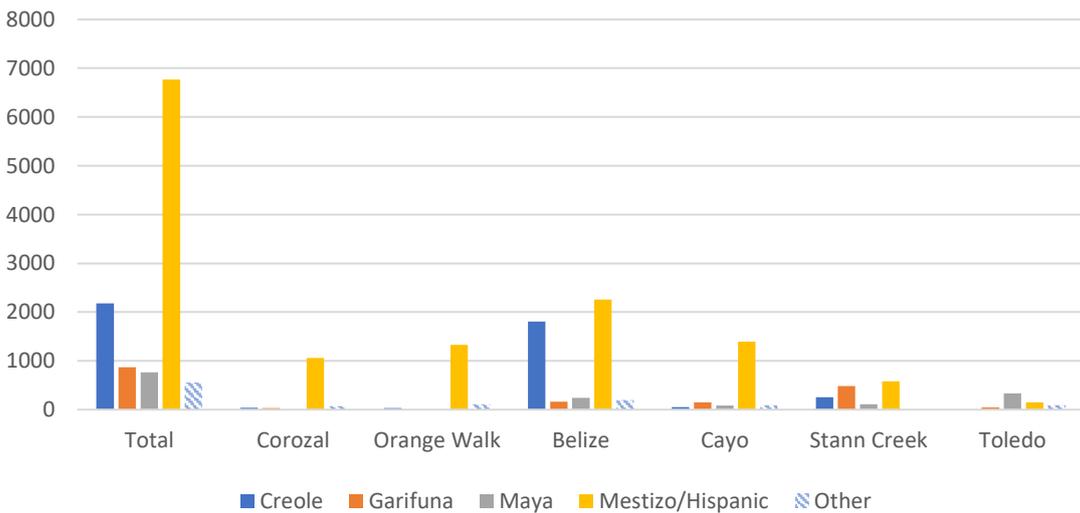


Chart 4 Workers (main occupation construction) by District and Ethnicity (SIB 2015a)



Construction workers and total labour force

Composition of the labour force by country of birth

Chart 5 Workers (main employment construction) by District and Country of Birth (%) (SIB 2015)

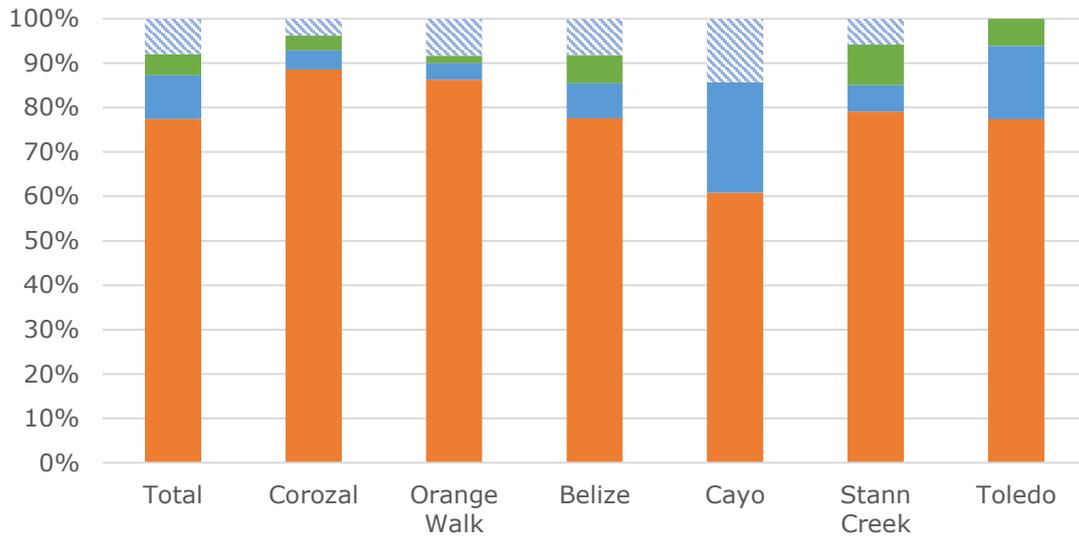
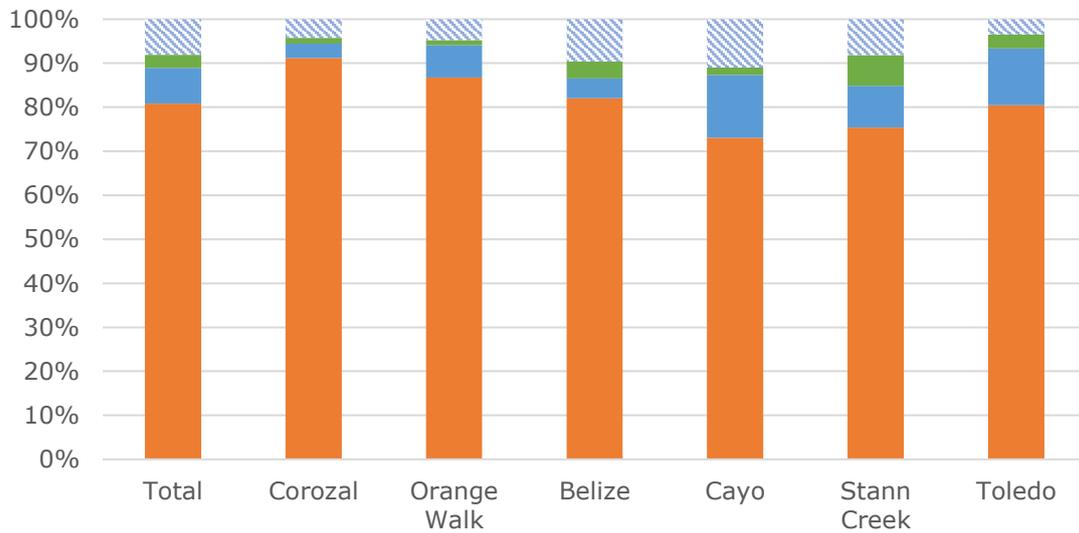


Chart 6 Total labour force by District and Country of Birth (%)¹²⁴ (SIB 2015)



■ Belize ■ Guatemala ■ Honduras ■ Other

¹²⁴ Excludes DKNS (Don't Know/Not Stated) 0.01%

Composition of the labour force by ethnicity

Chart 7 Workers (main employment construction) by District and Ethnicity (%) (SIB 2015)

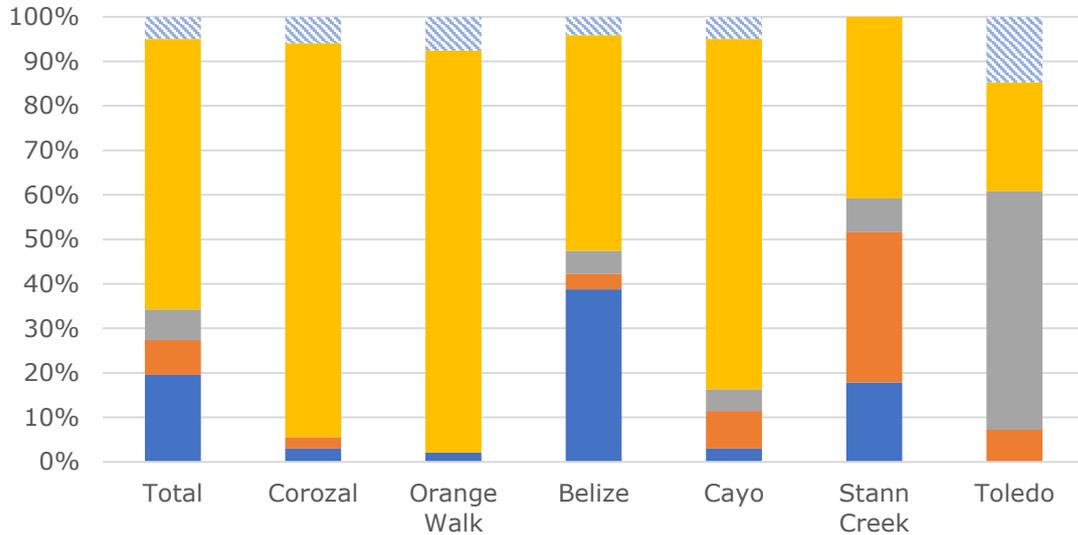
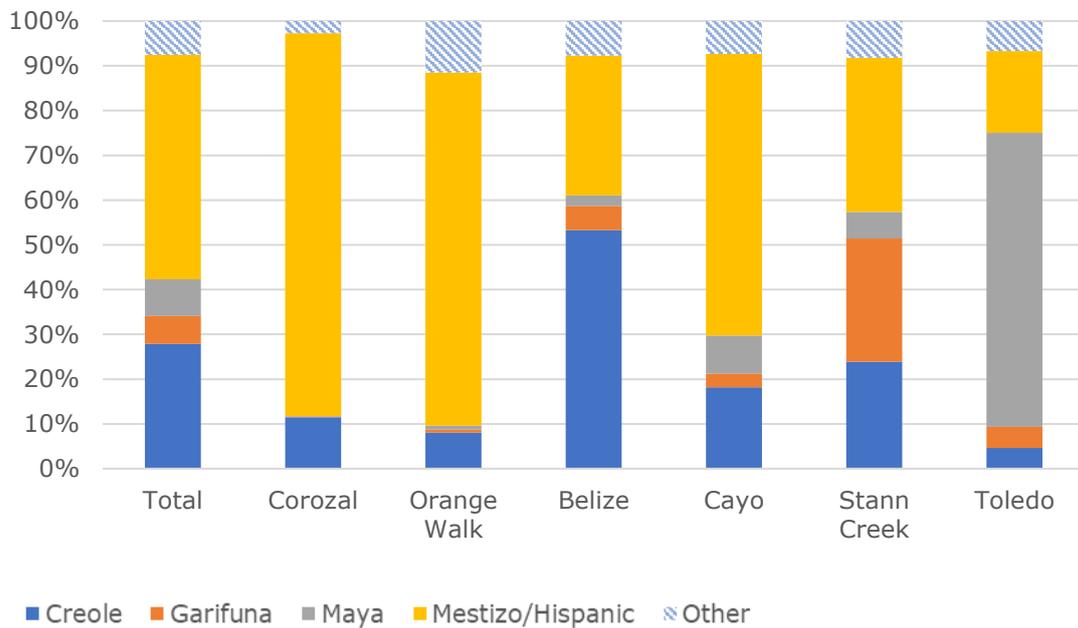


Chart 8 Total labour force by District and Ethnicity (%)¹²⁵ (SIB 2015)



¹²⁵ Excludes DNKS= 0.15% of total Labour Force

Composition of the labour force by kind of employment

Chart 9 Urban Belize District: employed labour force by kind of occupation¹²⁶ (SIB2015)

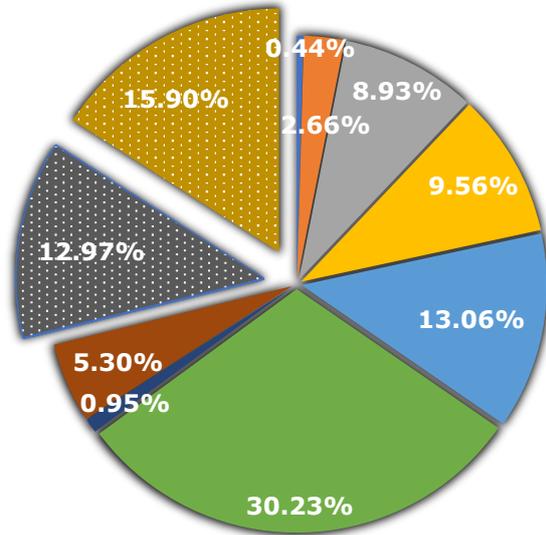
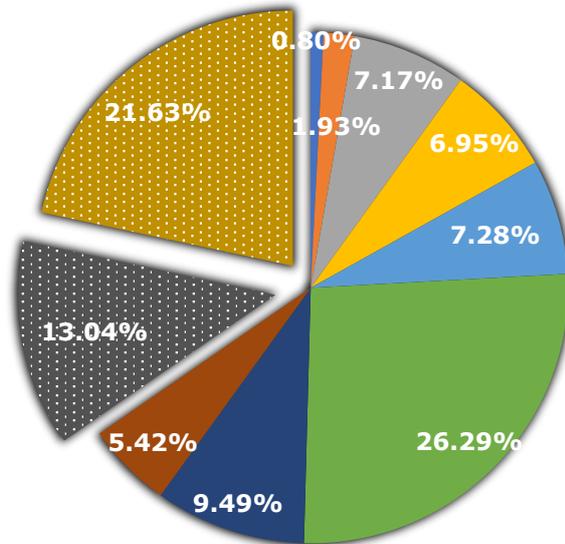


Chart 10 Belize (total country): employed labour force by kind of occupation¹ (SIB 2015)



- Armed Forces Occupations
- Managers
- Professionals
- Technicians and Associate Professionals
- Clerical Support Workers
- Services and Sales Workers
- Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Workers
- Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers
- Craft and Related Trades Workers
- Elementary Occupations

¹²⁶ Excludes DNKS 0.85%

Labour force by employer

Chart 11 Urban Belize District. Belize born Labour force by employer (SIB 2015)

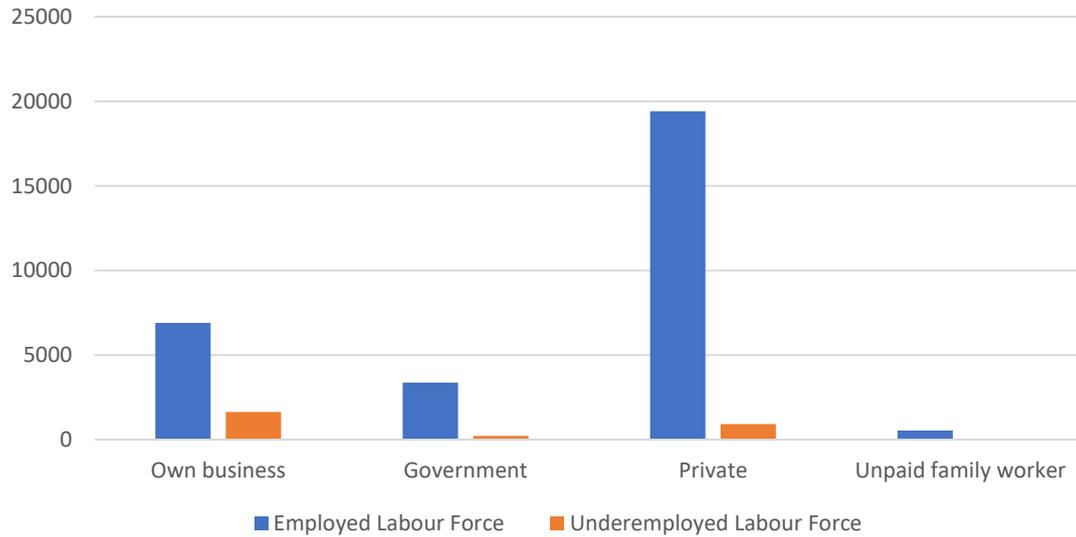


Chart 12 Belize (total country). Belize born Labour force by employer (SIB 2015)

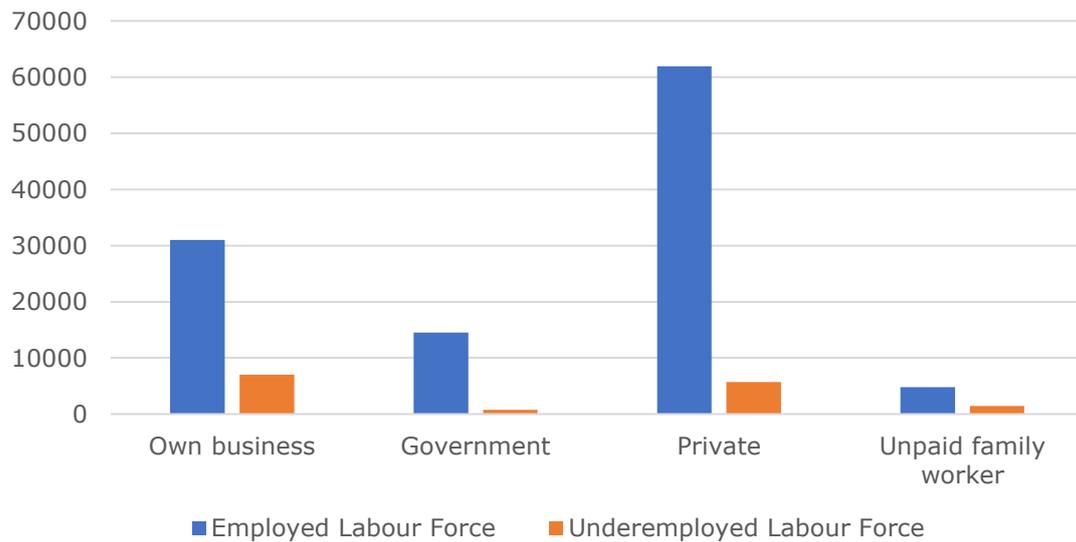


Chart 13 Urban Belize District. Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador born Labour force by employer (SIB 2015)

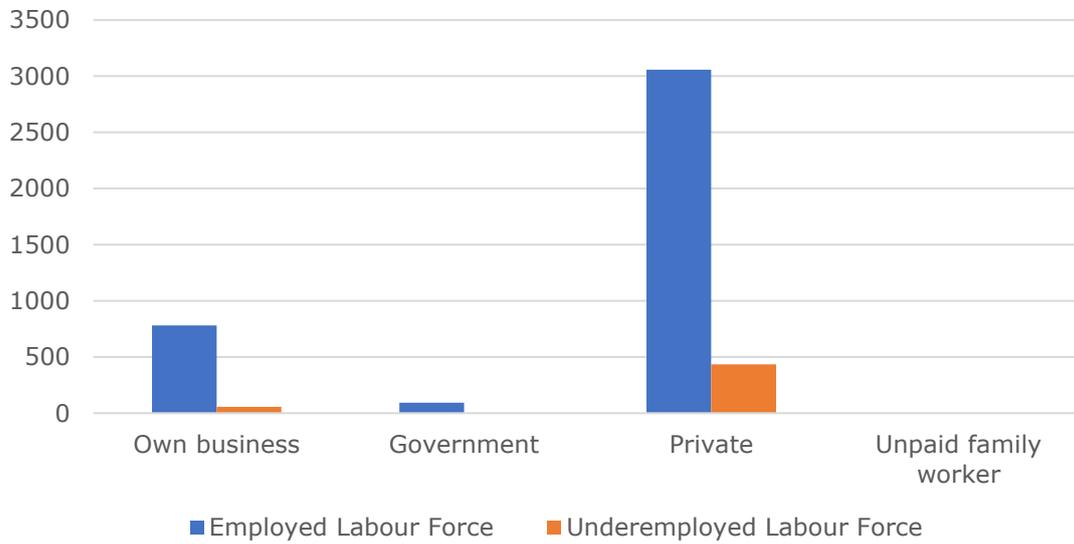
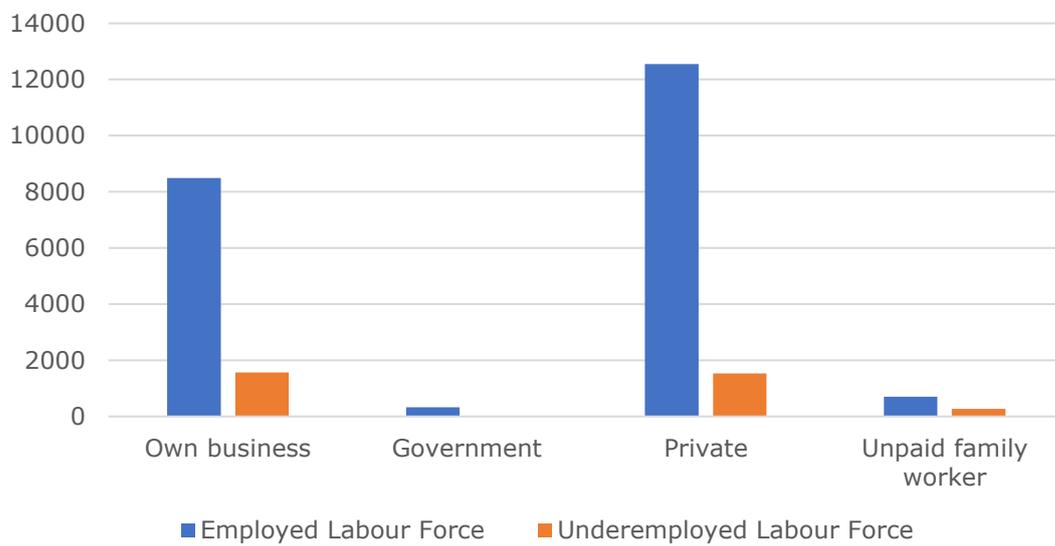


Chart 14 Belize (total country). Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador born Labour force by employer (SIB 2015)



Age groups

Chart 15 Belize City population by age groups (SIB 2010)

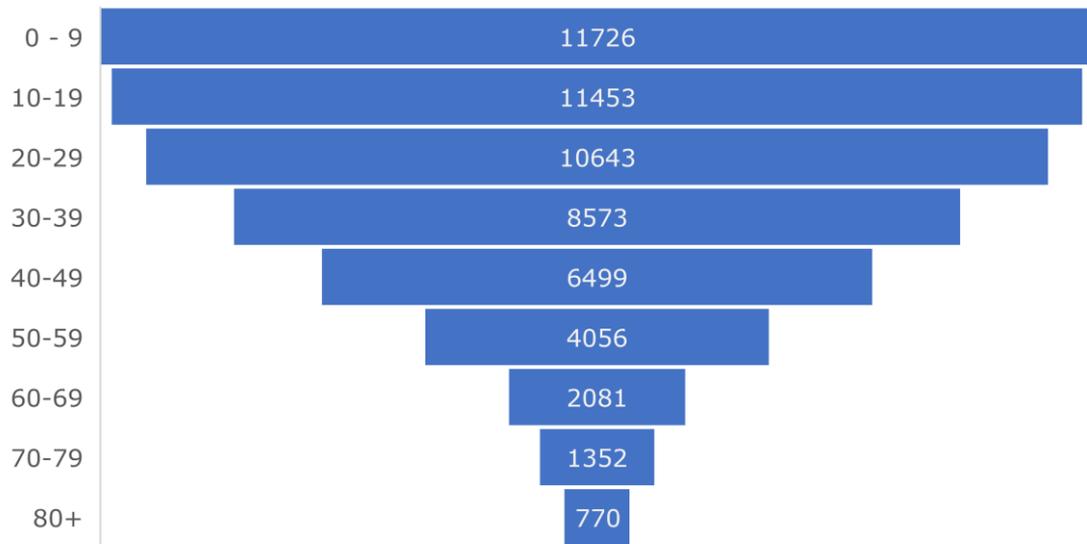


Chart 16 Urban Belize District born in Belize, Craft and Related Trades Workers + Elementary Occupations by age groups (SIB 2015a)

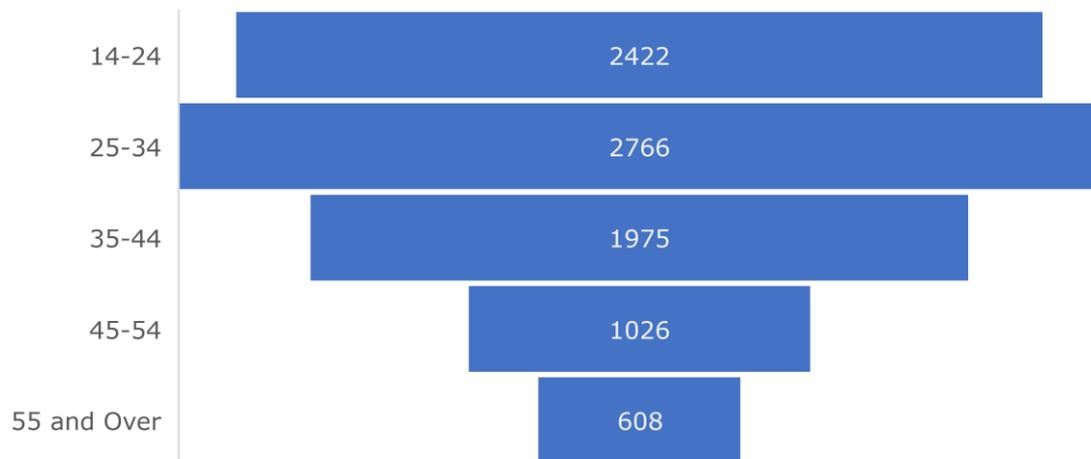
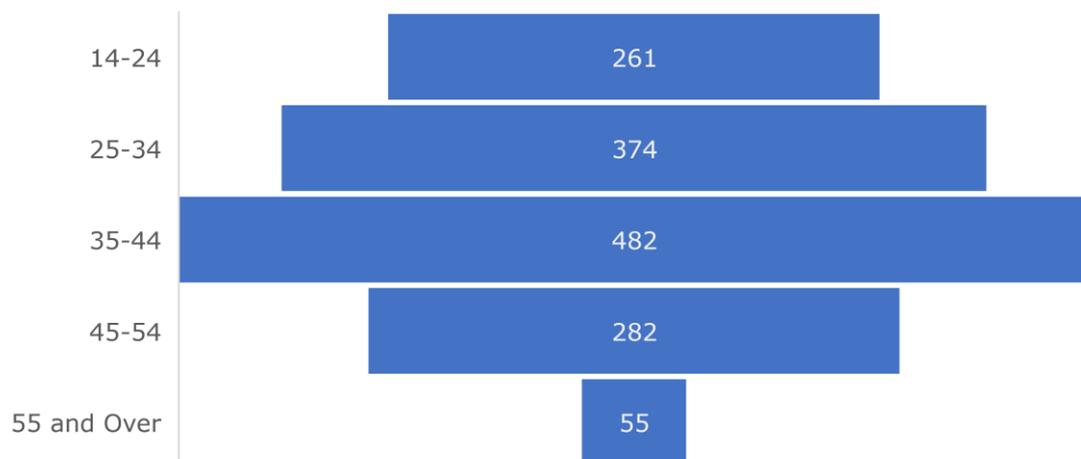


Chart 17 Urban Belize District born in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador Craft and Related Trades Workers + Elementary Occupations by age groups (SIB 2015a)



Buildings of Belize



Figure 16 Old wooden house near The Museum of Belize



Figure 17 Queen Street Baptist Church



Figure 18 Patchwork maintenance



Figure 19 Mix cement and wooden house



Figure 20 BTL Park, one of the areas with the biggest buildings in Belize City



Figure 21 New shopping centre, one of the largest in the city