

8 Posthurricane Resettlement in Belize

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The literature on the Caribbean includes various studies of migration, but these, for the most part, deal with some aspect of emigration or urbanization (Ashcraft 1972; Braithwaite 1961; Gonzalez 1969, 1975; Hendricks 1974; Philpott 1973; and Proudfoot 1950). There are few anthropological data on resettlement schemes in the Caribbean and even fewer on resettlement resulting from a natural disaster, despite the frequency with which disasters have occurred.

This paper deals with three resettlement schemes undertaken by the government of Belize after the disastrous Hurricane Hattie of October 1961. The schemes were of different kinds. The first involved the transfer of refugees to a temporary shelter during the initial period of reconstruction in the destroyed area; the second, the relocation of refugees from a destroyed coastal village to what was intended to be a permanent inland site; and the third, the transfer of public officers and other citizens from Belize City, in the exposed coastal area, to Belmopan, the newly built capital city. I rely principally upon my own experience in Belize before and after the hurricane. I was in Belize during Hurricane Hattie and knew the refugee situation at first hand;¹ I participated in the move to Belmopan; and I also knew some of those involved in the attempt to resettle the village population. Insofar as the analysis in this chapter is based mostly on hindsight and not on data recorded at the time, I make no pretension to providing a documented history of the three projects. Rather I am attempting to outline sets of cause-effect relationships involved in the movement of groups from one place to another. I believe that comparable patterns would occur in resettlement projects anywhere under constraints similar to those of Belize.

Du Toit (1975a:1-5) suggested that migration fits into a simple dichotomy: It is either voluntary or involuntary. As I shall argue below, a third type needs to be recognized. Anthropologists who have

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