

Dimensions of Refugee Policy in Belize

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DIMENSIONS OF REFUGEE POLICY IN BELIZE, A CENTRAL AMERICAN
FIRST ASYLUM COUNTRY

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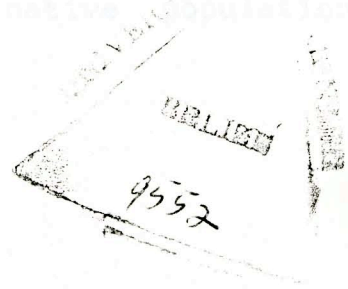
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AMERICAN FIRST ASYLUM COUNTRY

ABSTRACT

Introduction

Infancy in the field of refugees studies is perhaps best reflected in the paucity of research on refugee policy. Most of the studies are on First World third resettlement countries and are on immediate cause - effect relationship on issues, such as regional geo-political interests, humanitarianism, and the presumed compatibility of refugees within the host societies. This is a study on a first asylum micro-state in Central America that analyses three dimensions within which policy arose between 1980 and 1989. They are the political structure, cultural values, and the role of the UNHCR and the refugees themselves. Under political structure the paper highlights the main orientation of successive government administrations. It identifies cultural values among Belizeans that pre-dispose them to accepting refugees. Finally, it elaborates on the high pressure tactics of the UNHCR and the personal networks that refugees activate toward their integration. Together these dimensions foreshadow an almost inevitable acceptance of relatively so many refugees that make Belize one of the countries with the highest proportion of refugees to native population in the world.

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Introduction

Since 1978 all of the countries of Central America with the exception of Costa Rica and Belize have suffered massive violence politically motivated and with deep historical roots in discriminatory ethnic relations, economic exploitation, and excessive interference from superpowers (Torres-Rivas 1985). The results have been widespread dislocation and outpouring of refugees initially to the neighbouring countries including Mexico and then further afield to the United States, Canada, and Australia. In El Salvador alone, a country a little smaller in land area than Belize (whose total population is less than 200,000), there are over 500,000 people who are internally dislocated, about one million (or 20 per cent of the national population) have fled to the United States, and another 250,000 are dispersed within other countries in Central America and Mexico (Montes 1988:107-126).

Belize is a receiving country for refugees coming from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This is a study on the process of refugee policy formation in this Central American first asylum country. It starts by pinpointing the limitations of Belize as a newly independent state to formulate policy on refugees, among other issues of vital concern to the national

welfare. It continues by identifying broad social and cultural parameters that inform the evolution of policy toward refugees. Finally it reconstructs the historical evolution of refugee policy from 1980 to 1989 placing emphasis on the role of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the refugees themselves.

The field of refugee studies is still in its infancy and it is especially so in small Third World States such as Belize where most of the studies are unpublished reports that describe refugees and their impact on sectors of the host society. In attempting to go further than mere description this study is breaking new ground on a topic whose complexity is compounded by the unpredictability of quickly changing situations.

Furthermore it focuses on the background issues that contribute toward the formation of policy. In this regard our conceptual framework differs from that found in most studies on refugee policy, which emphasize its determinants and its immediate or long term effects. Topics that have been highlighted in such studies include regional geo-political interests and national security (Basok 1990:722-747), humanitarianism and political economy (Ramirez 1989), and selectivity of refugees based on presumed compatibility within the host society (Dirks 1984:279-307 and Hathaway 1988:676-715).

Finally, the thrust of our analysis is on the presence of refugees in the host country - whether legal or illegal - and not on their entry or resettlement. Policy arose in Belize after the

refugees were already in the country. A law that will define their entry is still being drafted up to late 1990 the time after the ending period for this study. Similarly, the government has not broached a specific policy on resettlement, although it has gone on record as supporting, the integration of refugees (Ferro 1989:13-16) into Belizean society.

Although our treatment of the subject matter is particularistic, in the conclusion we summarize the applicability of the analysis to the process of policy formation particularly within the Third World first asylum countries.

The sources of data are interviews with the UNHCR representative in Belize, ex-ministers, and other high level government officers; reports made available by the interviewees, the Refugee Office (RO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and non government organizations (NGOs). Other secondary information comes from ethnographic studies that both authors have carried out within the past five years in Belize bolstered by the general experience of living and working within the country. One of the authors lives in a neighbourhood in Belize City where several refugees have settled and has also served as chairman of the government immigration advisory committee between 1984 and 1989.

It is necessary to explain at the outset our use of the term "refugee". It is not in keeping with the terminology adopted by UN conventions. Rather, it is used in a generic sense

to refer to people who have arrived in Belize in large numbers from other parts of Central America within the past decade. The rather precipitous nature of their arrival within short periods confirms that by and large they came because of the political and economic dislocation ravaging their home countries. As we shall show throughout this paper, the gaps in the use of the term by the Belize government has led to some confusion as to whom it refers and justifies the generalized frame of reference that we have adopted.

Refugee Policy in a Third World First Asylum Country

To Third World first asylum countries refugees are additional burden to the already overwhelming problems they face in providing for the welfare of their own citizens. In most cases they cannot prevent refugees from crossing into their territory. The refugees themselves need assistance that is lacking and this in turn pushes the host country into the arms of international agencies, which also generate their own demands. These cogs in a downward spiral towards underdevelopment are some of the exigencies that provide a framework for the study of policy in such countries.

The perspective on state dependence differs considerably from the bias in the literature in the study of refugee policy. Firstly, the studies are almost all set in First World receiving countries far removed from the countries of origin. Secondly, the topics they cover under the source of policy are

philosophical/juridical and ask about the existence or not of an international moral order obliging sovereign states to offer asylum (Grohl- Madsen 1983:11-23 and Charlton et al. 1988: 237-250) The fundamental question whether the state can formulate and implement refugee policy is not addressed because the assumption is that First World countries can muster the political will and economic means to do so.

Belize is an example of a Third World country where it has been difficult to formulate policy on refugees among other topics of vital concern. It achieved political independence in 1981 and so far has not developed a machinery that could provide the adequate information indispensable for those who form policy.

Secondly, as a newly independent country it has not sufficiently developed its own tradition of working out policy. Rather there remains a tendency even among the politicians- those empowered to decide on policy - to prefer that it be imposed from outside, as the British Colonial Office had done for over 300 years (Shoman 1987). Into the vacuum left by Britain on granting Belize its independence the United States took over with the justification that it is located in a region with strategic interest during the 1980's Reagan administration war against communist aggression and drugs and that it is also a transit point for Central Americans and others heading north to the United States.

Parameters of State Response

The obstacles against making decisions about its welfare bring to the forefront the vulnerable position in which Belize finds itself in dealing with its refugee problem. The wave of recent refugees started arriving during the late 1970's but up until 1990 the government had not adopted any method to find out their numbers and whereabouts. In 1988 there were 4,863 officially registered refugees (see Table 1). By September 1990 the numbers reached 5,364. About half of the latter were living in the only refugee resettlement in the country Valley of Peace. The others lived in cities, towns, and villages as well as in their own isolated communities throughout the country. Apart from these numbers there is hardly any other specific quantitative data that the government has gathered about refugees.

In 1989 the Minister with responsibility for refugees stated at the Guatemala City International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) that in addition to the registered refugees there were "25,000 Central Americans" in the country (Rhaburn 1989). This statement is a significant milestone in documenting the government handling of the refugee problem. It was the first time that it revealed to the outside world that there were in Belize undocumented externally displaced persons who came in refugee-like circumstances and remained in the country as such. The externally displaced persons are a category

that the UNHCR acknowledges and had insisted on the Belize government that it do so. The government had refused but by including them in an official statement it was indicating a softening in its position. The wider significance of the question of displaced persons will become clearer further below when we discuss the relations between the UNHCR and the Belize government.

The Guatemala declaration was not meant to be a precursor to a thorough review of the government machinery on refugee issues including their enumeration. Rather it was to emphasize the need for international assistance within a forum set up for that purpose. The tendency to use information about refugees as a bargaining chip for international assistance remains a factor in Belize's dealing with actual and potential donor countries.

It is not clear how the government arrived at the figure of "25,000 Central Americans". In 1985 one of the authors did a study of the cases who registered in an Amnesty the government extended to all illegal aliens in 1984 (Palacio 1988:156-177) On the basis of the numbers of registrants he made a guarded extrapolation that between 1980 and 1984 about 24,000 Central Americans came into the country. Not all of these could qualify as refugees. Besides, there is a flux among them with some arriving and some leaving for Mexico.

Such an exercise showed that it is possible to arrive at some estimates should the government want to start with a base on

which to make serious projections about refugees. For a country surrounded by others with hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons from whom already thousands have arrived it is vitally important to monitor approximately who are settled and how many more maybe following. Belize so far has failed miserably in this regard. It reveals a generally myopic perspective that the government maintains on refugees - only reacting to immediate questions (often put forward by outside agencies) without consciously promoting a broader horizon of problem solving.

From our studies we extract the following information on who came and when. More than half of those coming were Guatemalans with the Salvadorans and Hondurans following in proportion (see Table 2). The Salvadorans and Guatemalans come by road and cross at any point through the 214 kilometer bush border to reach Belize (see Appendix 1). The Hondurans come by boat across the Gulf of Honduras as well as by road through Guatemala. By far most are Ladinos while only a small proportion are Maya Kekchi from Guatemala and Garifuna from Honduras and Guatemala.

The arrivals started to escalate in 1978. The timing of the peak periods as shown in Figure 1 varies by nationality. For El Salvador and Honduras it was 1983, and Guatemala 1984. We include Mexico in the graph to show the differentiation in percentages and patterns of arrivals between three countries with massive political and economic dislocation and another with less crisis.

In the absence of quantitative data on the impact of so many refugees coming within such a short period, there have been impressionistic statements circulated in the country. The competition to Belizeans in the labour market and the pressures on land use and on public health and education services have been most often mentioned.

Perhaps the most pervasive impact was an atmosphere of generalized fear that spread throughout most of the rural villages which made up about half of the total national population in 1980. In the Corozal and Orange Walk Districts they commandeered land which they used to grow marijuana at the behest of drug barons. The police also reported an increase in other types of crime such as homicide, kidnapping, and bank robberies that the newcomers committed. Notwithstanding the isolated nature of these acts their relative frequency had a cumulative effect of perpetrating the stereotypic image of the "violent aliens". The media contributed greatly especially some newspapers, whose editors were ideologically biased against Central Americans whether they be refugees or otherwise.

At another level of reaction the influx brought to the forefront of public discourse some cultural values that had long formed an underlying current in partisan debate among Belizeans. They are the personal freedoms guaranteed by the constitution, the direction of cultural pluralism, and the availability of land.

One of the greatest attractions of Belize was its

peacefulness and a lack of tradition to resolve public disputes through violence. On the other hand, there was a general concern that these traits would be tarnished by newcomers who, having lived through generations of political violence, would re-create it within their new setting. Some argued that to guard against this eventuality the refugees should be confined within geographic areas for close scrutiny. In response, the government (i.e. the respective administrations of the two opposing political parties) steadfastly rejected the suggestion arguing that such an act would prejudice the reputation of Belize as one of the countries in the Western Hemisphere with the highest regard for human rights. Indeed, Belize is the only country in Central America without any refugee camps. (Ft.)

A closely related question was the direction of cultural pluralism in Belize with disproportionate numbers of new Latinos as settlers. The historic background is that as former British subjects Belizeans had inherited a pervasive anti-Central American ideology (see Palacio 1990) to justify their distinction from the peoples in the other parts of the isthmus. A further irony was that more than half of those coming were from Guatemala which claims for itself Belizean territory. Some Belizeans argued that Guatemala had opened the floodgates to be able to populate what it could not acquire by other means. They added that, even should Guatemala not take over, the ethnic balance was being tipped against Afro-Belizeans who are traditionally discriminated against by Guatemalans and other

Central Americans. In either case Belizeans were set on a path making them culturally different than what they had ever been. An overall ignorance of the extent and the speed of the change added to a general state of public apprehension.

Another attraction was the fact that with one of the lowest proportions of population to land area in the region, eight per square kilometer, the country had a disproportionate amount of land. On the other hand, Belize has a grossly unequal distribution of land with a few persons and companies - mostly foreign - holding vast tracts. It is a topic that has been analyzed within the country's history (Bolland and Shoman 1971). More recently Wilk and Chapin (1990) referred to it as being patently prejudicial to the welfare of aboriginal rural dwellers. The inflow of refugees and their covetousness as primarily marginalized agrarian peasants have intensified the quest for available land. Belizeans themselves who might have believed that like their forefathers they could have access to at least a few acres of government land are awakening to find out that it is now only a dream. In most parts of the country almost all available land has been alienated or is already on government lease.

The Growth of Policy

Having highlighted some parameters in which the people and government of Belize responded, we can re-construct the directions of policy toward refugees between 1980 and 1990. In a

previous publication (Palacio 1990:21-25) one of the authors had identified three chronological phases in the evolution of government policy. They are basic humanitarianism between 1979 and 1984, amnesty in 1984, and restriction on admission between 1984 and 1989. In this section we attempt to analyze the dialectical process in the evolution of the three phases.

Long before the use of the term "refugee" in the modern sense Belize had been a country of asylum for the persecuted from the neighbouring countries of Mexico and Central America. It took place more because of the persistence of the incomers than the determination of the British colonial authorities to accept them. Those coming included the Garifuna from Honduras, the Maya from Guatemala and Mexico, Mestizo from Mexico, and Ladino from Guatemala and Honduras. Like the recent Central Americans they came, they saw, and they settled. As rural folk they were able to establish their villages in enclaves isolated from communities where the British and their subjects resided. However, during times in colonial history they had to pay various taxes that the authorities arbitrarily levied; could not own land; and were forced to become cheap labourers. Through many immigration/resettlement schemes that the British had attempted they had shown direct preference for persons originating in Europe and the West Indies than those from neighbouring countries, who they subjected to racial discrimination (personal communication with Angel Cal).

The influx of recent refugees starting in the late 1970's

took place when the nationalist Peoples United Party (PUP) formed the government during the penultimate years of colonial rule. The PUP had won all the national elections held in Belize since the introduction of adult suffrage in 1954. To a large extent their victory came from consistently espousing a populist ethic in direct opposition to the obsequious affinity with the old order that other political parties maintained (Grant 1976).

The reaction of the PUP to the newcomers predictably took the direction of actively accepting them as settlers in contrast to the traditional xenophobia of British colonial authorities. While retaining the British preference for immigrants who had the financial capability to contribute directly to the country's economy, the PUP reversed the earlier predilection to turn a blind eye on the downtrodden from within the region. Even after the start of the recent large scale influx it routinely granted permanent residence status to persons from the neighbouring countries up to late 1982.

In accommodating the ease of entry and settlement for the refugees the government did not establish a consistent administrative machinery to screen and register them. Furthermore, in 1984 it administered an amnesty programme for the benefit of all illegal aliens most of whom were Central Americans.

The effort which gave the government its highest crowning glory of humanitarianism was the Valley of Peace Resettlement Project (VOP). It was carved out of the jungle and designed for

refugees and Belizeans with each household head receiving on lease 50 acres of government land. Despite widespread post facto criticism of the way how it was conceived and implemented (Munro 1989:207-250), the government was able to reap from it considerable praise on the international scene as well as some political mileage locally. The Valley of Peace Project was described as a unique example of magnanimity when most countries were implementing restrictionist policies to refugees (Asomani 1982:4-6).

Between 1981 and 1985 the UNHCR spent 4.4 million dollars (Belize currency or \$2.2 million U.S.) mostly on infrastructure at the VOP site. At a time when the government was undergoing serious cash flow problems, which drove it into the arms of the IMF in 1982 this amount came as welcome foreign exchange. Some went into the budgets of Ministries that took responsibility to provide the infrastructure while others went to sub-contractors within the extended clientilism of the party in power.

Furthermore, the location of the settlement which was about ten miles from the newly built capital city of Belmopan was a means of introducing into its environs a population that could produce much needed agricultural crops for urban consumers. The residents of VOP have lived up to this reputation while also being available for the job market in Belmopan.

In 1985 the PUP lost in general elections to the UDP. Whereas the PUP had maintained a populist orientation sympathetic to incorporating refugees in creating a new multi-cultural

Belizean nation in opposition to the narrowly colonial society it inherited from Britain, the UDP came into power with a decidedly different orientation as to the main problem affecting the country and how to deal with it. They decided that the state of the economy was the problem needing the most attention and that the solution rested in a monetarist policy generating new sources of capital. Foreigners would have a specific function either as sources of direct foreign exchange within the immigration policy or as labour for the new jobs to be created in the economic recovery programme. Shortly after assuming power the UDP amended the country's constitution to include a new status of economic citizenship aimed at monied incomers originating in the Far Eastern countries of Taiwan and Hong Kong. By contributing specific amounts of revenue they were eligible for Belizean citizenship.

Unlike the PUP, the UDP was more prone to regard Central American incomers collectively as aliens who should satisfy immigration laws or be prosecuted. While not forming laws governing refugees, it passed statutory orders under existing laws to control the entry of illegal aliens.

But the problem of the need for labour was untractable to the UDP. The processing of sugarcane, citrus, banana, and other crops - most of which showed expansion under the UDP - relied on an insatiable demand for cheap labour originating from the same countries as the refugees. Whereas refugees can work as field hands, the vast majority were recruited from their home countries

on temporary labour permits. It was a practice that the PUP had also made use of but it had mushroomed with the renewed economic upsurge.

The new government passed regulations against the use of undocumented foreign labourers, which were only loosely enforced. On the other hand it did not tighten its checks to ascertain that those with temporary labour permits return to their home countries at the end of the time periods stipulated. As a result hundreds remained in the country and joined the ranks of those relegated into the state of illegal aliens. It was an example of the selective use of legislation to appear to be against illegal aliens while simultaneously not adequately protecting them if they were some way integrated into the economy.

The new government did not completely abandon its obligations toward refugees. Although Belize at that time had not signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, it applied UN accepted standards to vet asylum seekers. In the words of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Belize would not be "an open area for refugees" and would not go beyond the dictates of basic humanitarianism as acknowledged by international law. The Refugee Office within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted strict guidelines to screen asylum seekers through hearings by an eligibility committee on which the UNHCR representative sat.

As it accepted more refugees the government was anxious to

receive international assistance to cope with the additional burden. With this determination it fought a diplomatic battle against Guatemala's refusal for its admission into the UNHCR led initiative to solicit funding for refugees and the displaced in Central America. Belize was successful and was able to participate fully in the historic CIREFCA conference held in Guatemala City in May 1989, where representatives of donor countries met with representatives of all Central American countries and Mexico. It marked the beginning of the UDP's efforts to internationalize Belize's refugee problem extending further from the limited scope of the UNHCR. Within three years of being in power it succeeded in placing itself at the position of soliciting capital and technical assistance for selected development projects beneficial to both the refugees and Belizeans. Appendix 2 is a list of the projects.

Pressures Toward Permanence

While there was ambivalence among Belizeans and within the administrative and executive levels of government on their admission and settlement, the refugees themselves were consolidating their permanence within Belizean society. The UNHCR was most instrumental in working toward this goal under its mandate to strive for a durable solution of permanently rehabilitating refugees within the country of first asylum.

By using their own personal networks to enter the country the refugees initiated their own integration. Our studies show

that there are almost equal numbers of adult men and women in refugee settlements. It differs from other countries where women and children predominate while the men are away. The pattern reveals that there are relatively easy access and communications between sending countries and Belize. Besides, in many cases the family members were able to re-group before entering the country as their communities of origin were located kilometers away from the Belize border (see for example McElroy 1986).

They came either as family units or single adults who found partners among their compatriots or from Belizeans. The parts of the country where they most settled are the Spanish-speaking Cayo, Orange Walk, and Corozal Districts. More than three quarters settled in rural villages (see Appendix 1).

Generally their level of education is low, slightly more than half not having finished primary school. Their houses have mud floor, thatch roofs and only the bare essentials for accessories. As primarily rural agrarian folk they resume their small farming as a means of livelihood squatting on land or through sharecropping. They also rely on seasonal employment in agro-industries and doing part-time manual labour. Toward this end they maintain a wide network of information and frequently move to areas where they could find land and work.

Whether their status is legal or not they have access to health and education services offered by the state and international or local non-government agencies. The latter have also formed cooperatives among them mostly in the Cayo District

that offer the use of land which may be otherwise unavailable. By law registered refugees and illegal aliens cannot own land. More recently some NGO's have offered classes on literacy and learning about Belizean law and customs.

Surveys show that the newcomers regard their rather deprived socio-economic conditions in light of their previous endangered conditions in their home countries and the potential that Belize offers to pull themselves by the booth straps within a peaceful environment. Most would not want to return and would prefer to stay. A main problem they identify is the negative image the Belizeans have toward them (Palacio 1985). By 1989 only one family had officially requested repatriation (Foster 1988:82).

We have already seen the sizeable assistance that the UNHCR gave to the VOP Project and to internationalize the Belize situation through CIREFCA. They were only a part of its comprehensive contribution to enhance the social and economic welfare of refugees. For an itemized list of funding targets achieved up to 1989 see Appendix 3.

The Refugee Office and various Government Ministries were the main channels for the assistance. Others included the semi-government Development Finance Corporation through which refugees could receive small loans for income generation and a few national non-government agencies. With UNHCR support the latter were able to add refugees to their list of clients for the first time thereby acquiring experience that they could repeat in responding to a new clientele and requesting funding from other

donor agencies.

Perhaps the UNHCR effort that had the greatest impact on generating a sensitivity among Belizeans toward refugees was its advocacy programme using the media, teaching workshops for public officers, and conferences among scholars and community leaders. Briefly, the message was on its own international role within the worldwide refugee problem, the particular context of Central America, and the obligation of host countries. Coming at a time when the Belizean public was still not familiar with the implications of refugee status as offered by the UN, the publicity campaign helped to change the perspective from "what should be done with all these aliens" to "what could be done to help refugees". By translating much of the materials into Spanish the refugees also learned more about themselves and their rights.

The combined effect of the UNHCR presence was to project itself as a moral force holding high the international ideals of humanitarianism when, as we have already seen, the issue of refugees was often buried within the labyrinth of national partisan politics. In the day to day execution of the UNHCR agenda the country representative was actually a high pressure lobbyist several times coming into head-on collision with Government Ministers and Administrators. It was a function of both the abrasive methods that he used and the fact that government personnel were unaccustomed to having a UN representative being in close contact with them on a regular

basis. The UNHCR is the first UN agency to maintain a resident officer in Belize.

Furthermore, it was not too long before the government became aware of the quid pro quo nature of UNHCR transactions. It made two prime demands - that Belize ratify the UN 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol and that it recognize displaced persons as bona fide refugees according to the 1983 Cartagena Convention.

The Cartagena Convention stipulates the generalized context of fear in sending countries as legitimate justification for refugee status. Up to September 1989 the government refused to ratify the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol but confirmed that the legislation it planned to pass would be within the spirit of the UN position.

The question of displaced persons was more thorny. The response of the government was that in accepting displaced persons it would be increasing by vast numbers its case load from a source of potentially thousands when its resources were already overburdened. Besides, even with about 6,000 registered refugees Belize already had one of the highest proportions of refugees to native population of the world.

Before the government could give a positive response the UNHCR representative provided assistance to what he termed as eligible displaced persons claiming that the international mandate of the UN gave him the authority. There thus became at least two sources of providing assistance in the country, one being the government Refugee Office and the other the UNHCR.

Such a situation did not contribute to an atmosphere of good working relations.

This became only one of several factors of contention between the two parties. However, the government gradually began to work within the spirit of accepting displaced persons. As we saw earlier its 1989 statement in Guatemala City was more than an indication of a softening of its position toward them.

Dimensions Of Refugee Policy

In summarizing the dimensions of refugee policy in Belize we start from the general and end with the specific.

At the level of the state structure there was a malaise to identify the numbers of refugees and their whereabouts. The main reason would seem to be a distinct preference by those who should determine policy to acquiesce into a convenient position of ignorance on the actual scope of the refugee problem. The refugee problem is a highly volatile political issue that militates against the carrying out of decisive action. It is, therefore, expedient for those in authority to admit that they do not really know too much and to cite impressively sounding numbers when making a point, mainly in drawing attention to their dependence on foreign aid.

The self-imposed ignorance, however, does not preclude the use of the refugee problem as a factor within partisan political discourse. We see it emanating as a core issue with its own dialectical dynamic in Belize during the decade of the 1980's.

The PUP reaction to British xenophobia against Latinos from the neighbouring countries influenced their decision to be open to accepting them. The UDP - also in reaction to the PUP - used their monetarist policy to articulate where the refugees could fit as source of cheap labour within their plan of economic recovery. At the same time they found it necessary to appear as espousing a restrictionist posture against aliens. These two positions proved irreconcilable to the UDP up to the time when they left office in 1989.

This contradiction was one of the several bits of ammunition on which the UNHCR capitalized as they single mindedly lobbied the government to accept their agenda. With their vast international experience and relatively high financial profile in an impoverished country it was only a matter of time before they would convince the government to adopt most of their demands. The fact is that as a Third World first asylum country Belize is highly vulnerable to pressure.

The dimensions begin to narrow into the specificity of the Belize situation with the refugees themselves. The profile of refugees coming into Belize differs from that in other first asylum countries. They were men and women who came with their own personal networks that they had formed in their original countries. It was a factor of not landing in Belize directly from the immediate locality of persecution. Rather they had travelled extensively giving them enough opportunities to retrieve old family/household ties or to form new ones.

The strength of family ties increased in Belize partly because of endogenous socio-cultural factors that by themselves were independent of the refugee situation but were amenable to their resettlement and eventual re-adjustment toward the path of full - if not illegal - residence.

Notwithstanding the general fear among Belizeans during the first years of the massive influx, the refugees were able to settle among Belizean Spanish speakers in the Cayo, Orange Walk, and Corozal Districts.

Besides, cultural values within the host society proved not only attractive to the newcomers but also greatly facilitated their integration. They include the sanctity in the protection of personal freedoms, a value among Belizeans that made the concept of refugee camps untenable; a tradition of cultural pluralism that does not automatically reject new groups; and a belief that every citizen should have access to some government land.

In summary while reiterating that it is necessary to be conscious of several factors that underlie the formation of policy, we would place additional emphasis on the pre-disposing social and cultural traits of the refugees and the host society. This is the uniqueness of the Belize situation.

FOOTNOTE

In December 1990 the Prime Minister nominated a commission of inquiry to investigate allegations brought forward by the Human Rights Commission of Belize on the torturing of a Guatemalan by the Belize Police Force. The fact that such an obligation brought forward a response by the Prime Minister himself is indication of the very high regard that the present administration has on human rights.

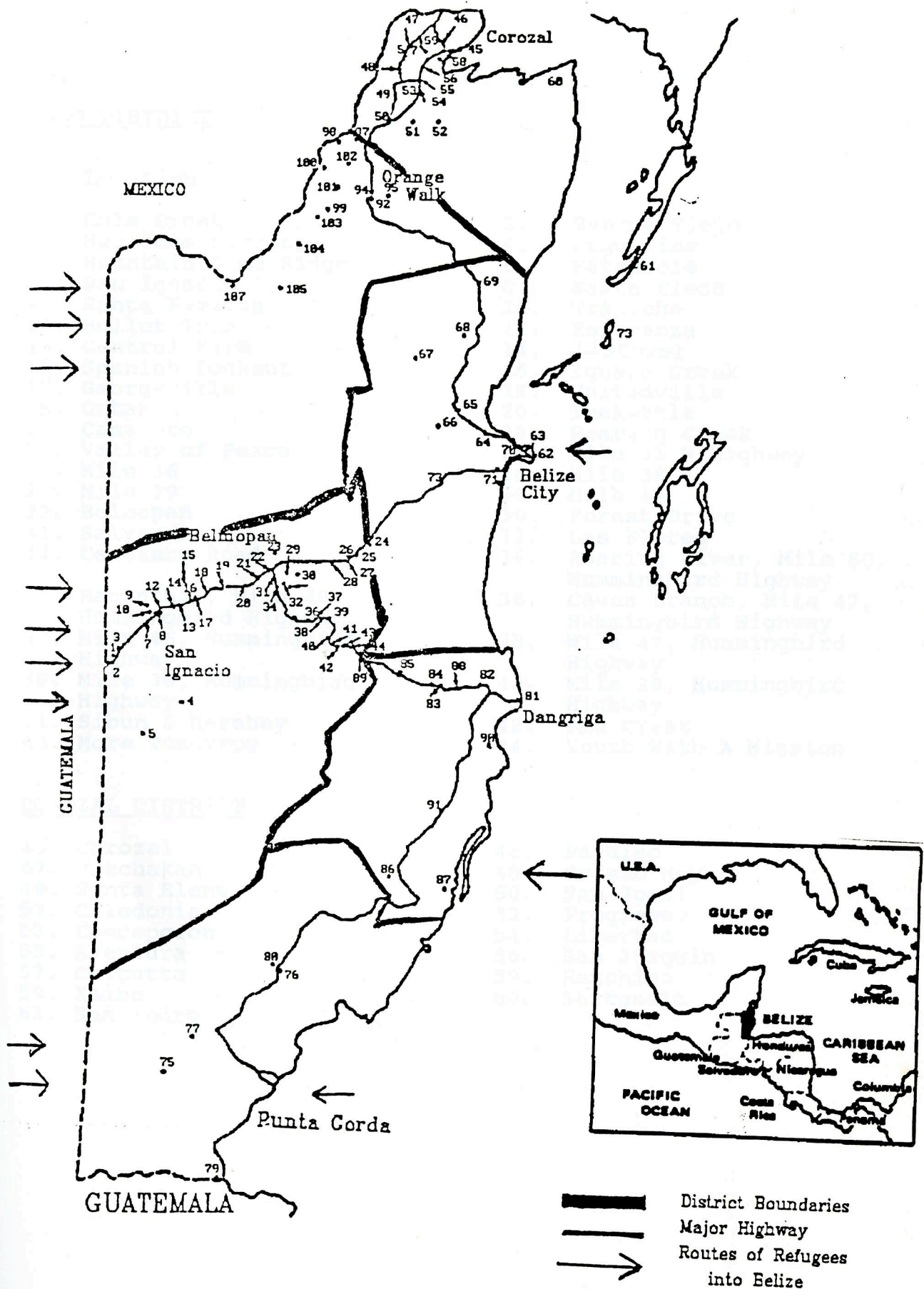
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Appendix 1. Map of Belize Showing Routes of Refugees and their Settlements.

From D.M. Munro (1989: 207-250)



Key

CAYO DISTRICT

No. Location

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Cala Creek | 2. Benque Viejo |
| 3. San Jose Succotz | 4. Augustine |
| 5. Mountain Pine Ridge | 6. Waterhole |
| 7. San Ignacio | 8. Santa Elena |
| 9. Santa Familia | 10. Trapiche |
| 11. Bullet Tree | 12. Esperanza |
| 13. Central Farm | 14. Listowel |
| 15. Spanish Lookout | 16. Iguana Creek |
| 17. Georgeville | 18. Unitedville |
| 19. Ontario | 20. Teakettle |
| 21. Camalote | 22. Roaring Creek |
| 23. Valley of Peace | 24. Mile 31 W Highway |
| 25. Mile 36 | 26. Mile 38 |
| 27. Mile 39 | 28. Mile 44 |
| 29. Belmopan | 30. Forest Drive |
| 31. Salvapan | 32. Las Flores |
| 33. Cemetery Road | 34. Roaring River, Mile 50,
Hummingbird Highway |
| 35. Mananthal, Mile 48,
Hummingbird Highway | 36. Caves Branch, Mile 47,
Hummingbird Highway |
| 37. Mile 46, Hummingbird
Highway | 38. Mile 42, Hummingbird
Highway |
| 39. Mile 38, Hummingbird
Highway | 40. Mile 28, Hummingbird
Highway |
| 41. Sibun & Hershey | 42. Red Creek |
| 43. More Tomorrow | 44. Youth With A Mission |

COROZAL DISTRICT

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 45. Corozal | 46. Paraiso |
| 47. Patchakan | 48. Cristo Rey |
| 49. Santa Elena | 50. San Jomal |
| 51. Caledonia | 52. Progreso |
| 53. Concepcion | 54. Libertad |
| 55. Aventura | 56. San Joaquin |
| 57. Calcutta | 58. Ranchito |
| 59. Xaibe | 60. Sarteneja |
| 61. San Pedro | |

BELIZE DISTRICT

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|
| 62. Belize | 63. Bella Vista |
| 64. Ladyville | 65. Mile 21, Hummingbird Highway |
| 66. Burrell Boom | 67. Biscayne |
| 68. Altun Ha | 69. Maskall |
| 70. Rockville | 71. Mile 7, Western Highway |
| 72. Hattievile | 73. Caye Caulker |

TOLEDO DISTRICT

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 74. Punta Gorda | 75. Santa Teresa |
| 76. Golden Stream | 77. Mafredi |
| 78. Cool Shade | 79. Sarstoon Creek |
| 80. Indian Creek | |

STANN CREEK

- | | |
|--|--|
| 81. Dangriga | 82. Melinda Forest Station |
| 83. Mile 16, Hummingbird Highway | 84. Mile 17, Hummingbird Highway |
| 85. Middlesex, Mile 21 Hummingbird Highway | 86. Cowpen |
| 87. Mango Creek | 88. Pomona, Mile 21, Hummingbird Highway |
| 89. Santa Maria, Indian Creek, Mile 34 Hummingbird Highway | 90. Freshwater Creek |
| | 91. South Stann Creek |

ORANGE WALK DISTRICT

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 92. San Jose Palmar | 93. Pettville |
| 94. Orange Walk | 95. Trial Farm |
| 96. San Jose | 97. San Luis |
| 98. San Roman | 99. San Lazaro |
| 100. San Antonio | 101. Yo Creek |
| 102. San Lorenzo | 103. Trinidad |
| 104. Augustine Pine Ridge | 105. San Felipe |
| 106. Iguana Creek | 107. Blue Creek |

Table 1. 1988 Registered Refugees by Country.

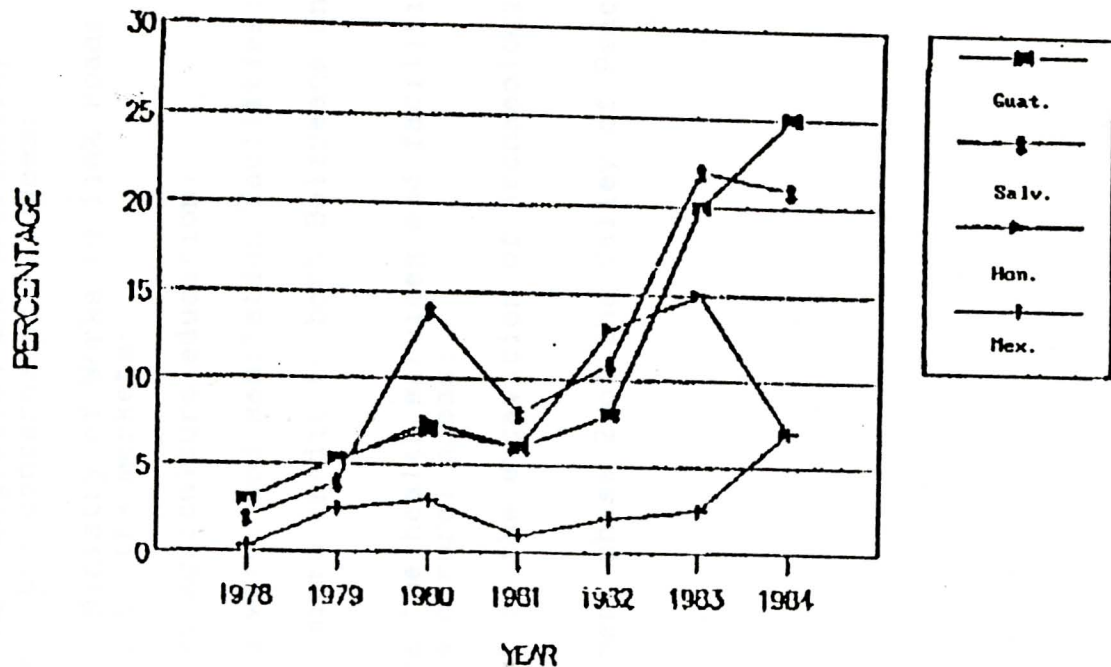
Country	Cases	Family Members	Individuals	Total
Guatemala	1,550	2,613	943	3,556
El Salvador	419	1,094	174	1,268
Nicaragua	19	20	17	37
Ghana	1	0	1	1
Chile	1	0	1	1
Total	1,990	3,727	1,136	4,863

Table 2. Seven Main Nationalities
Registered in the 1984
Amnesty

Nationalities	No.	%
Guatemala	3,204	50.8
El Salvador	1,725	27.4
Honduras	903	14.3
Mexico	314	5.0
U.S.A.	70	1.1
West Indies	13	0.2
Nicaragua	11	0.2
Other	65	1.0
TOTAL	6,305	100.0

FIGURE 1.

Percentage Arrivals of Nationalities by
Year from 1984 Amnesty Results.



Appendix 2

List of Belize Government Projects Submitted at CIREFCA

1. \$345,000 to assist the Immigration and Nationality Department to address the concerns of Refugees;
2. \$1,202,000 to assist Ministry of Works to link roads and other facilities to the markets;
3. \$1,273,000 to support Agriculture education;
4. \$2,945,000 to extend water and sanitation facilities;
5. \$715,000 to provide micro credit to both Belizeans and Refugees;
6. \$1,26,000 to improve the health services and facilities in Districts towns and rural areas;
7. \$2,230,000 to assist in the excavation of Archaeological sites;
8. \$1,683,000 to implement phase 2 of the Valley of Peace.

- Local Integration of Displaced Refugees in Belize

- Counseling in Belize (Bz. \$77,970 - 1986)

(a) Registration, documentation and
basic aid (Bz. \$89,800 - 1987)

(b) Primary school education and adult
literacy courses (Bz. \$95,750 - 1987)

(c) Sanitation and health in Cayo
(Bz. \$34,000 - 1987)

- Revolving fund for Displaced Refugees in Belize (Bz.
\$35,000 - 1987)

From Byron Foster report "The Impact of the 1989 Refugee Crisis in Belize - diagnosis, strategy and plan of action."

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Appendix 3

List of Selected Projects Funded by UNHCR in Belize 1981 - 1988

- Focus on Valley of Peace Project (1981 onwards:)
- Multi-purpose Assistance to Salvadoran Refugees (Budget: US\$176,700: 1982).
- Belize co-beneficiary in Legal Assistance Project in Northern Latin America (Total budget: US\$17,050 - 1982).
- Counseling in Northern Latin America (US\$18,000 - 1983)
- Local Settlement Project (Total budget US\$61,130, inc. other beneficiaries - 1983)
- Counselling to refugees in Belize (US\$30,600 - 1984)
- Legal Assistance to Refugees in Belize (Bze. \$8,000 - 1984)
- Valley of Peace Project (1984)
- Local Integration of Refugees in Belize 1985)
- Counselling in Belize (Bze. \$74,300 - 1985)
- Legal Assistance in Belize (Bze. 45,544 - 1985)
- Local Integration of Dispersed Refugees in Belize (US\$280,000 - 1986)
- Local Integration of Dispersed Refugees in Belize
- Counselling in Belize (Bze. \$77,970 - 1986)
 - (a) registration, documentation and basic aid (Bze. \$89,800-1987)
 - (b) primary school education and adult literacy courses (Bze. \$98,750 - 1987)
 - (c) sanitation and health in Cayo (Bze. \$34,850 - 1987)
- Revolving funds for Dispersed Refugees in Belize (Bze. \$35,000 - 1987)

From Byron Foster unpublished manuscript report 1989 "Refugees in Belize - diagnosis, strategies, and plan of action."

