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From Strangers to Neighbors: Post-Disaster Resettlement and Community Building in Honduras, byRyan Alaniz. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. 196 pp. ISBN: 9781477314098.

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REVIEWS

From Strangers to Neighbors: Post-Disaster Resettlement and Community Building in Honduras, by **Ryan Alaniz.** Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. 196 pp. $29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781477314098.

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Analyzing how post-disaster interventions (e.g., disaster-induced resettlement) are designed and implemented and how they may affect or enhance the multiple dimensions of local people's well-being is crucial for transformative learning and the enhancement of current and future disaster risk management at local, national, and international levels. However, most disaster management and development practices focus on issues related to economic growth and infrastructure development. There is little acknowledgment of other features of affected local communities' well-being, or of the social dimensions of post-disaster and development interventions. Little is known about what makes these interventions successful in terms of social development outcomes, while, sadly, they keep being seized on as opportunities for corruption, business as usual, disaster capitalism, and infiltration by organized crime.

With his book *From Strangers to Neighbors: Post-Disaster Resettlement and Community Building in Honduras*, Ryan Alaniz provides a valuable contribution to disaster and development theory and practice. He analyzes disaster-induced resettlement implemented in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch in 1998. In addition to infrastructure and economic livelihoods, he asks which mechanisms and characteristics are necessary to support the development of resettlement into a "healthy community."

To answer this question, Alaniz explores the resettlement projects built in El Valle (Tegucigalpa, Honduras) during the recovery process following Hurricane Mitch. Alaniz focuses on two resettlement projects:

Suyapa, built by the Catholic organization *La Iglesia*, and *Pino Alto*, built by the national secular NGO *La Internacional*. These resettlements were built in order to move survivors from the emergency shelter to new permanent housing. From 1998 until 2004, seven organizations constructed nearly 4,000 homes and resettled approximately 18,300 survivors. Displacement, dispossession, and social disarticulation caused by the disaster and the uncertainty of living in emergency conditions for years meant that previous neighborly relationships got disrupted. As discussed by Alaniz, all resettlements built in El Valle were resettlements inhabited by strangers who needed to become a community over time. Suyapa and Pino Alto were similar resettlement projects yet had divergent community development outcomes. As Alaniz explains, this provided him with an opportunity to conduct a comparative case study to explore what transforms a resettlement into a successful community.

Alaniz discusses theories of social capital and community development approaches (i.e., technical assistance and self-help approaches). Drawing from sources such as the Institute of Medicine (2015), he develops a "social health index" that captures five different but interconnected aspects of social life: crime, social capital, collective efficacy, community participation, and vision. Finally, he describes these five features within Suyapa and Pino Alto. Using a multi-method ethnographic approach and some quantitative data, Alaniz outlines the main differences between the two resettlements. In Chapters Five and Six, Alaniz enriches his passionate and in-depth description of Suyapa and Pino Alto, encompassing issues such as land use and infrastructure, resettlement design, livelihoods, leadership, trust, participation, religiosity, social interaction, and governance. He also describes the different developmental approaches of the two NGOs, their philosophy and vision, the different community empowerment approaches they adopted to shape the

governance of the resettlement, and the challenges and conflicts the NGOs had to cope with. In the last chapter, drawing from lessons learned from the resettlement projects analyzed and using a path-dependence approach, Alaniz discusses the key factors that influence community development outcomes and the building of a community culture in post-disaster resettlement.

Alaniz's book is worth reading for two main reasons. First, he sheds light on features of local communities' well-being that are often underestimated in disaster and development literature. However, the social health index and the variables selected within it seem too narrow. Perhaps reference to current advances in development and resettlement studies (e.g., Smyth and Vanclay 2017) and a greater availability of data and evidence would have helped the author better frame the multiple dimensions of local people's well-being. Second, the author provides useful insights into the philosophy and approach to community development held by the development organizations, and he explores how these attitudes shape their selection procedures and allocation criteria, the building of community culture, the strategies to mitigate conflict, and the rates of trust, participation, leadership, and crime within the resettlement.

Two main lessons can be learned from Alaniz's work. First, building a "community culture" while carrying out post-disaster interventions is crucial to achieve positive community development outcomes. However, most of the time, the organizations engaged to implement post-disaster interventions and community development do not have a full comprehension of local communities' well-being. As shown by Alaniz, the organizations that plan resettlement are often not experienced in the field of community development. The lack of a structuring framework often leads to the building of a community culture that reflects the vision of the organization leading the project, rather than a shared vision that takes into account local communities' well-being, their vulnerability and resilience. Second, the quality of the empowerment strategies adopted by disaster and development organizations matters, as well as the time when the

empowerment strategies are implemented. The excessive focus on technical assistance or, on the contrary, the lack of organizational support, results in the disempowerment of local people. Mid- and long-term recovery interventions, such as resettlement projects, cannot be analyzed without taking into account short-term recovery actions. Lack of empowerment strategies during the earlier phases of disaster management negatively influences community development outcomes at later stages of recovery.

There are a few questions that remain unanswered throughout the book and perhaps can be an inspiration for future research. Why "from strangers to neighbors" rather than "from affected neighbors to resilient neighbors"? What happened to previous neighborly relationships, and should these be recovered as soon as possible, or does "building back better communities" mean building new communities elsewhere? And, finally, who should implement empowerment strategies for more resilient neighbors, and how should these strategies be designed and implemented before and after disasters? As noted by Alaniz, at the time of Hurricane Mitch, Honduras was suffering a political and economic crisis with corruption and elite capture being rife at local, regional, and national levels. There were fears of corruption and diversion of aid, especially involving the military. Failures of past state-based disaster responses led the international community to think about the likely positive contribution the private sector could have provided in the recovery following Hurricane Mitch. However, as in the case of centralized, top-down, state-based approaches, private organizations are also likely to be influenced by elite capture and disaster capitalism, as they are often not informed by any solid theoretical background in community development or local communities' well-being and resilience.

A likely response to past failures of both top-down state-based or NGO approaches may be the design of new institutional arrangements and deliberative spaces (e.g., Imperiale and Vanclay 2016) ensuring that public and private actors—and a broader constituency of local societies—share social responsibility for local people's well-being.

Putting at the core of these empowerment strategies an understanding of local people's well-being, their vulnerability and resilience, means that social sciences should have a greater say in recovery and development processes and that a new public ethics should be built—one that is capable of developing a community culture of well-being and resilience and preventing elite capture, corruption, and organized crime infiltration in post-disaster and development interventions.

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Squatters and the Politics of Marginality in Uruguay, by **María José Álvarez-Rivadulla.** New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 224 pp. $119.99 cloth. ISBN: 9783319545332.

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Most of the world's population now lives in cities. A snapshot of the typical urban dweller these days would likely situate her in the global South and living in some kind of informal housing arrangement: a slum, a shantytown, a squatter settlement. Although urban squatting is a growing phenomenon around the world, Latin America since at least the mid-twentieth century has been at the forefront of global trends in housing informality, forming a key node in the cottage industry of scholarship on the dynamics, character, and meanings of housing precarity and urban marginality.

Conventional academic attention to urban land squatting in Latin America has emphasized the patterns of rural-to-urban migration that characterized much of the twentieth century, as residents were displaced from their rural landholdings, whether through land speculation, agribusiness incursions, extractive industries, mega-development projects, or environmental disasters. Migrants sought new economic opportunities in cities that were usually ill equipped to handle these mass incursions, so they settled in informal, self-constructed housing, creating slum belts in the peripheries of cities such as La Paz, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Tegucigalpa, or Mexico City or, in cases like Rio de Janeiro or Medellín, along mountainsides and environmentally marginal areas of city centers. Much of the early scholarly work on urban squatters focused on cultural debates over the character of urban marginality and to what extent squatters can maintain agency in the face of often dangerous, dismal, and even deadly life conditions.

Squatting in Uruguay's capital, Montevideo, has received little academic attention. The paucity of English-language scholarship on Uruguay (on squatting and beyond) is likely due to the country's small size, Montevideo's early urbanization and middle-class foundation, and the traditionally "exceptional" nature of its history and development. *Squatters and the Politics of Marginality in Uruguay,* María José Álvarez-Rivadulla's fascinating book on squatter movements and the political economy of land invasions in Montevideo, helps fill this important scholarly gap. As her meticulous and nuanced study illustrates, the Uruguayan case resonates with the regional story of squatting as a response to the negative pressures of neoliberal reform and the political opportunities of democratization. But the case also highlights interesting exceptions and heterogeneity in relation to housing informality across the region. Well written, carefully argued, and drawing from a sophisticated longitudinal and mixed-methods approach, the book represents a valuable contribution to scholarship in urban sociology and contentious politics.