

## Anthropology in Belize: Regarding the edition of the work of Joseph Palacio<sup>1</sup>

*Antropología en Belice: Sobre la edición de la obra de Joseph Palacio*

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My “Maestro” has deposited into my hands a great responsibility to do a prologue of his chosen works in four volumes entitled “Practicing Anthropologist: Collected Papers of Joseph Orlando Palacio”. It is worth saying at the outset that this author recognizes that what he has done is a way of life that is never finished and is always under construction. This is the way of life for some social scientists, who remain fully engaged in this discipline. Underscoring this is a quotation the author cited with all humility taken from Nigel Bolland, who identifies him as an activist and an academic committed to his community as well as his nation, a nation that, as we shall see, he helped build, hence the name of this first Volume “Building a Nation”.

Before going into detail into the content of the Volume, it is necessary to reflect on publishing efforts in Belize, an activity into which only a few have ventured with the notable exception of Judith R. Lumb and her publishing house *Producciones de la Hamaca*. Having published various items on Belize, and especially on the Garifuna, this outlet has launched the compilation under review. The reader will realize the distinguished work that *Producciones...* has produced by a glance on Lumb’s webpage and her vocation toward service as stated in her logo “Celebration and documentation of Earth and all her inhabitants. Restoration and conservation of Earth’s natural resources. Creative expression of the sacredness of Earth and Spirit.”

Coming back to the general context within which the articles of this compendium were created, we refer to the second half of the last century, a time when Central American dictatorships were turning their attention toward an internal war. At that moment Belize, a small littoral country of almost 2,000 square kilometers, twice the size of El Salvador, located in front of the Gulf of Honduras between Mexico in the north and Guatemala to the east and south, was undertaking its momentous path from British colony to become the youngest nation in the continent. It was within this background that Joseph Palacio finished his secondary school. At that time young persons from remote parts of the country, as he himself mentioned, had little, if any opportunity to move forward in education. In 1972 he returned to Belize, having received specialized training in Mesoamerican archaeology from the University of Manitoba.

<sup>1</sup> The text that we reproduce below is the preface written for the model of the initial edition that would be made of the work of Joseph Palacio. As is usual in these editorial exercises, the compendium was rearranged and accommodated in three volumes that we quote with the images. Previously reviewed the teamwork carried out by Palacio together with Carlson Tuttle and Judith Lumb (Arrivillaga, 2014, 143-145), which I refer to for this account.



In Belize he continued the task started by Dr. Peter Schmidt to build the government Department of Archaeology and, more particularly, to create an institution that would help safeguard the national patrimony that colonial tradition had neglected. As the author says in his Introduction, this first Volume has a part referring to the decades before the 1970s which coincides with the heroic efforts of George Cadle Price to exhort the youth to participate as builders and extricate from colonial British Honduras the new nation of Belize. Palacio heard this call and became a follower. He refers to a special event when he heard Price speaking that puzzled his youthful mind. This collection of writings is his response to what he heard on that day; or at the least underscores its relevance to him as well as his firm engagement and solidarity.

We present here a very brief (brevísim) overview of the articles found in each Section of Volume I. Each Section itself has its own introduction and each article has an abstract and key words. Besides, it has its own bibliographic references, where it was published or if delivered at a conference, or if part of a larger paper, which is available on the webpage of *Producciones de la Hamaca*. We limit ourselves to highlight key elements that are of interest to us and the context in which it was presented, as well as some notes on the author's career and professional formation, keeping in mind the thread of articles that form this volume.

At this time, we refer to Palacio's return as archaeologist and head of the Department of Archaeology, papers that make up the second Section entitled "Archaeology and Anthropology", the moment when Belizeans took over their archaeology for the first time. The four archaeology papers were salvage projects that –among other things– had a teaching function to protect archaeological artefacts as well as detailed description of the finds themselves. Apart from the last article, which moves away from archaeology, all the articles were published in local journals. Thus, we note that the papers carried a pronounced nationalist theme of planning and carrying forward salvage operations, giving life to new laws, while formulating protocols and norms of application in the field and otherwise.

Let us start with "An unusual pottery vessel from the Cayo District", an interesting article that introduces one item that came to the attention of the Department of Archaeology in 1972, when the new antiquities legislation came into effect. This law sought to show the nation intervening not only by safeguarding the past but also to explain details of the past. The item in question dates back to the pre-Classic period; exquisitely restored by Harriot Topsey. It is very well described and analyzed. In this one of the first writings of this author we see a person passionately rigorous, detailed, and meticulous, characteristics that we will see repeated in his following works.

Next comes "Archaeology in Belize-Belizeans in archaeology" coauthored with D.E. Puleston and C.A. Bennett. This article continues with a strong pedagogical thrust and a clear promotion for salvage and conservation. It refers to a salvage excavation in Orange Walk District that shows the value of stratification over time together with analysis of lithic and ceramic artefacts. There is also included a detail explanation of the methods of excavation complete with the items found and comparative analysis with items from other sites within the same chronological period. The main find was the skeletal remains of a woman who lived more than a thousand years earlier.

The next article "Buttons and bones at Benque" is also the result of a salvage operation this time of several bones and buttons of eroded metal associated with bits of cloth from a military uniform analysed from a multidisciplinary perspective. Included were an archivist, who recovered data about buttons, a dentist who recovered data about the teeth, and an archaeologist who initiated the study on receiving information from the police. Since it covered colonial period remains the importance of the find is its projection away from the Pre-Columbian period of the country's patrimony. The significance is that by its own nature and history, Belize also has a bountiful colonial patrimony (wooden houses, vats, logging operations, and various forms of cultural remains) all of which is subjected to rapid decay.

The fourth article, “Excavation at Hokeb Ha Cave, Belize” also displaying the same level of rigorous attention pinpoints the socio-cultural direction that this scientist would be assuming. This study narrates an interesting field experience about a salvage operation undertaken by the Department of Archaeology in which for the first time there are close interactions with the community starting with informing the alcalde about the fieldwork to be undertaken. In reciprocal exchange the villagers participated actively in the salvage and retrieval of their patrimony. We see the early beginnings of a social archaeology event. As in this case and in so many others, Palacio was the pioneer. This is the most detailed of all the papers on archaeology, being subdivided into chapters and filled with detail description done rigorously.

This collection of papers ends, as we have already indicated, with a socio-cultural preoccupation. It is a provocative document clearly with de-colonization and the liberation of the people in mind. It is the only article so far that was opened to the outside world through *Current Anthropology*. He did it before proceeding toward his doctorate, re-visiting his earlier preoccupation and questioning his chosen discipline, its direction and its effectiveness in building a better society. For the history of our discipline in Central America it is a pivotal study. Reading it today, with almost two decades into the twenty-first century after so many events that have taken place, we discover a highly relevant essay. It depicts a point of departure for the author and indicates the future work that he would undertake. At an early time, it foreshadows a critical look at the discipline and its role in reconstructing a better world, or as in this case the re-fashioning of a new nation with better opportunities.

In 1976 JOP leaves to pursue further studies, this time to Berkeley where he received his doctorate in 1981 in economic anthropology. For one more time this *Baranguna*, restless in his quest for better opportunities for development, becomes the first anthropologist of Belize. Beforehand he had been the first archaeologist. Also, in 1981 a primary dream milestone was achieved. After many challenges which Mr. Price confronted, Belize joined the world of independent states.

It is in Section Three, Anthropology in Nation Building that we see the best indication of *Building a Nation* finding its place. Joseph Palacio took up an appointment with the Extra-Mural Department of the University West Indies (UWI) and shortly thereafter until 1990 became associated with the Consejo Superior de Universidades de Centroamérica (CSUCA) whose headquarters were in Costa Rica. He undertook a series of studies, which, although they do not fit into the branch of applied anthropology, have much relevance to the sketching of public policy, decision-making, designing of activities and more especially in generating quantifiable hard data of given complex realities. He participates actively in much documentation –among other activities- directed towards re-fashioning the new nation-state. It is worth noting that unlike the practice of consultancies normally done in Central America, Palacio’s work was linked to such areas as resettlement, community participation in governance, child abuse and neglect, the family, local government, and projections for Belize toward the year 2000. These became the main themes for the next six articles. They became a panoramic profile marked by external cooperation and the national agenda for development.

The first paper in this Section “Post-hurricane Resettlement” is an interesting account of three experiences of forced relocation and resettlement. They refer to the effect of hurricanes, a phenomenon of frequent occurrences along the coast but little studied. It is interesting to note that this first study in this Section brings to attention a significant marker in the history of this nation-state as well as being an important factor within its coastal geography. We also have to remember that an important effect of national disasters is the widespread disruption of infrastructure and the national emergencies that emerge.

The study focuses on the plans for long term resettlement from temporary shelters in three main projects –Hattieville, Seine Bight, and Belmopan– all taking place after Hurricane Hattie that struck in 1961. Palacio pays particular attention to the building of the city of Belmopan, a project that should

have taken the interest of urban students of the region to build from scratch the new capital city of Belize. Since Palacio was living in that city, he was able to insert firsthand experience into this study. It is interesting to further note that the works of this author navigate between the *etic* and *emic*.

The next paper responds to a request from PAHO to study community participation, health, and development. The title is “Case studies on community participation” done with the help of Lakshmi Kurella, Timmy Palacio, and Gaynor Ferguson Palacio. The main aim was to identify the nodes of community participation within the field of health. Two case studies were undertaken, the Maya community of Santa Cruz in the Toledo District and St. Martin a Creole community in Belize City, being two settings where contrasting elements of community participation could be observed. In the search for community participation and the mechanisms that trigger it, there is an effort to explore successes in health that arose from community participation. The reader needs to realize that Palacio does not end only with description, he goes further to explore underlying causes that clarify what is seen on the surface.

There follows a study done within Belize City, “A survey of child abuse and neglect in Belize City”, which displays a capacity to shift between themes, notwithstanding how small the universe of the study may be. Again, Palacio was able to do a pioneering study for Belize. Again, he used a questionnaire, which became a central tool in the work of this author and an important method to arrive at numerical indicators from qualitative data. In this case he attempted to define the boundaries across child abuse, neglect, abandonment, and physical punishment as found among the most vulnerable groups within the society, namely children.

This is the first study of its kind done in Belize to arrive at policies and directions for the National Council for Child Abuse and Neglect. It sought to arrive at alternatives to change physical punishment at the home and school. Furthermore, it uses as backdrop information on who intervened in the application of the survey instrument, the design of the questionnaire, related issues, and finally difficulties in dealing with taboos within such an effort.

The possibility of generating lists as point of departure, constructing baselines, and identifying possibilities of cooperation, these are all characteristics of this Section. The previous studies and “Survey of family life and fertility in Belize” included cooperation with various international organizations, such as UNICEF, PAHO, and UNFPA. The Ministry of Health also collaborated. The author was able to lay the framework for development using information derived from the knowledge, attitude, and practices within family life, fertility, and reproductive habits of various ethnic groups, economic and social classes as well as place of residence, and type of occupation.

Another possible source of assistance to promote projects is identifying local community sources as within Local Area Community Organizations (LACOS) in Belize City. Such experience was the focal point of the paper “Rise of local area community organizations in Belize City”, which look at methods of mobilization within parts of Belize City. Again, this was another pioneering effort, looking at topics, such as sanitation within local communities in Belize City. Each of the case studies provides a chain of responses and a context for many respondents. The unfolding results allow a view of the poorer citizens of Belize City compared to others. The study ends with a brief conclusion, bearing in mind that its immediate objective was to document examples of community participation.

This section concludes with an article published in Spanish, “Belize: Changes towards the year 2000” included among articles on the Central American region edited by Edelberto Torres Rivas. It is a look into the immediate future: “Central America Towards the year 2000, Options and Challenges (Caracas, 1987)”. It must be the moment and the origin of this initiative that determined the data which informs us of Belize as a new reality within the region.

The article is written as we transition from colonialism to an independent country—a decolonized world. It shows Belize as an accepting and welcoming nation to those who come for trade, family rela-

tions and as a refuge for Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans and some Mexicans. Several were the goals set out for this by the year 2000, from a regional perspective: put an end to marginalization and achieve full cooperation with her neighbors. Like her neighbors little progress was achieved in this area to the detriment of the region and its development. The fight against the vestiges of colonialism is also placed as a pending task in spite of the permanence of its Independence.

The fourth and final Section “Migration, movements of people” brings into limelight one of the significant characteristics of this nation, the migratory influx, given that it finds itself within the shade of the internal armed conflict of its neighbours (Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras). The magnitude of the impact on the country is overwhelming, especially as Belize was going through its own independence struggle at the same time. For Belize it was caught in its own struggle to find internal solutions to its own intractable problems on achieving independence. These papers depict an anthropologist who becomes aware of this grave reality and exposes it to the government and organizations, who were charged with the responsibility of generating development and peaceful co-existence. As we have already seen in the previous Section, some of these studies are baseline efforts that generate quantifiable data and are especially appropriate to peel through the complexities of the urgent situation.

While Belizeans were ready to build their own independent nation that they were dreaming of, they were forced to welcome thousands of Central Americans, who arrived by land and sea, forced to seek a new home for themselves. Their presence demanded a wide-ranging response that included not only strategic planning but also an immediate agenda of cooperation and development forthcoming from international organizations under the leadership of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Within the framework of response there arose that of legality, which provoked an abrasive response from the young nation, namely, that the problems affecting the refugees were the same as those for rural Belizeans.

The first study chosen for this Section is a “Survey of Central American immigrants in four urban communities in Belize”. It attempts to define the reaction of a young nation confronted with the forced presence of thousands of refugees. The study describes the questionnaire and its variables. Briefly the study was directed toward being a planning instrument and to provide a framework for more study. As in previous studies, the underlying aim was to confront the new reality after the abrupt arrival of Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Honduras, who together made up about half of the country’s population.

The study describes their arrival and settlement, occupation, and adjustment to Belizean society. Most were younger men and women, who took advantage of their own networks, with no technical qualification, and requiring assistance within their semi-urban communities. The study shows men and women with their fears, expectations, and the hope for receptivity from Belizeans; and displayed a firm belief to improve their conditions despite all the adversities. They particularly appreciated the sense of freedom they felt. Although many wanted to move for economic reasons, political considerations weighed heavily among them.

The next article continues with the rural/urban theme, a dichotomy that is appropriate to the Belizean reality. If the previous effort targeted a general readership, this one focuses on one community, a part of Belmopan, a community of Salvadorans and Guatemalans. Like its name, it is a community of Central Americans, ‘Salva’ in Belize (Belmo) pan. The study focuses on the biography of the informants. It also describes their settlement, food, health services, education, and other factors that show their adjustment to both rural and urban facilities, hence its title “A rural/urban environment for Central America immigrants in Belize”. It proceeds with the aim of suggesting proposals for funding.

It is worth mentioning that there is an unexplored dimension, namely a sociopolitical reality within the receiving society distinct from that in the sending society of the refugees. The fact is that even the

arrivals did not know that they were assisting with the consolidation of the new capital city of Belmopan. While Belize was still British territory, Belmopan was first settled in 1971 as the new capital city. As in the case of Brasilia or Canberra, there was need to move from the coast inland thereby helping consolidation of greater agricultural potential.

The other dimension of the experience of refugees is that in in the veritable whirlpool of so many Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Mexicans many remained without legal status as identified in the paper “Illegal aliens in Belize”, a study that searched for answers and further actions to implement. The study sought to highlight persons, who took advantage of the offer of amnesty by the government. As in the case of other studies, there was an effort to bring quantification to masses of qualitative data referring to the attributes of the respondents. The study describes how the refugees arrived in the country mainly through a heavily forested and porous border as well as through the open sea. Furthermore, Belize is a country with low population density and land use. These together with a parliamentary tradition and a justice system inherited from Great Britain increased its attractiveness.

This section ends with an article published in Spanish “Belize: changes toward the 2000”. It fits within a collection of articles on countries in Central America and is edited by Edelberto Torres-Rivas. The title is “A look into the immediate future: Central America toward the year 2000, options and challenges” (Caracas: 1987). It must be the moment and origin of this initiative that determined the data, which informs the reader about Belize as a relatively unknown country in Central America. The article is written as Belize proceeds through a transition from colonialism to an independent country—a decolonized world. It shows her as an accepting and welcoming nation to those who come for trade, family relations and as a refuge for Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Hondurans and some Mexicans. Several were the goals set out for this by 2000, from a regional perspective: to put an end to marginalization and achieve full cooperation with her neighbors. Like her neighbors little progress was achieved in this area to the detriment of the region and its development. The fight against the vestiges of colonialism is also placed as a pending task in spite of having achieved independence.

This series of articles –mainly explorations on refugees, ends with a theme that demands attention, the impact on the field of national politics on the presence of refugees in a young country that was still consolidating its judicial norms without any experience in these kinds of situations. At this point there is a paper co-authored with Michael Stone and entitled “Dimensions of refugee policy in Belize”. It is a quick look on what was taking place in a double bind situation, a perspective to reject and not accept refugees vs. the pressure exercised by the UNHCR and other organizations to accept them, resulting in this young country becoming a welcoming centre with a very high proportion of refugees relative to its small population. Such imbalance places at risk its own viability to be born as a nation in this continent. On the other hand, with the notion of refugees being common on this coast, this new point of reference complete with juridical norms distorts the routing explanation of this reality.

From this study there is now expected a qualitative evaluation of the resulting integration as well as to share elements useful in formulating specific policies on resettlement. Equally there is needed to identify elements of integration within a context of underlying anti-Central Americanism. The profile that presents itself is that of the immigrant as a central actor within the local and regional context. Furthermore, it becomes necessary to formulate close bilateral relations, especially within the context of the Q’eqchi. It is clear that Guatemalan politicians and public officers should study closely this and other writings and assign to them high relevance.

The following paper focuses on another face of the migration dynamic, the migration of the Garifuna into Los Angeles, which at that time was the largest gathering of this population originating from the Gulf of Honduras. The study recalls a phenomenon that had been taking place since the 1960s and has several antecedents “Garifuna immigrants in Los Angeles, attempts at self-improvement”. It is a work

that brings forth a strong question on cultural permanence within the process of dispersion into North America. Done in 1981 and 1982, the study traces migration as a form of self-help, the patterns of life in Central America, the search for permanent jobs coinciding with the increase of certain industries in Southern California.

Joseph Palacio chooses to end this volume with an article that to a large extent unifies the underlying question in this Section and in the entire Volume, the implications of all of this human mobility on the state of Belize at the end of the 20th century. This work approaches us in a quantifiable manner thanks to multiple surveys that outline a demography of change as the title of the paper says “Social and cultural implications of recent demographic changes in Belize”. There is a narrative of the changes that have gradually transformed the cultural landscape of Belize without their being a radical phase imposition. The cultural impact of Central Americanization is profound and has amplified the concept of plurality. While some of these traits have assumed a national identity, others remain at the community and ethnic levels and have joined within the inter-ethnic matrix characteristic of Belize. The diet has changed so also the clothing, house design, beliefs, and practices, to mention only a few examples. The consequence of this process of creolization that many times comes more from the demands of those arriving than those who have long settled would seem to add to the character of this coastal country, the youngest continental nation of the New World.

We have seen Palacio’s writings consolidating with its own ending within the compendium. There are diverse manifestations of Palacio, as an activist in his society, the years of study, the fieldwork and ethnographic work, the consolidation of the first public office in Belize to safeguard the national patrimony, the institutionalization of archaeology in Belize, and afterwards developing a practicing anthropology, his role as a consultant and expert for international organizations, but above all as an organic intellectual. There is a total of three volumes that together make up the practicing anthropology of Joseph Palacio. Building a Nation (Vol. 1), Cultural Diversity and Caribbean Indigenous Peoples (Vol. 2), and, Garifuna People and Barranco (Vol. III).

## Reference

Arrivillaga, A. (2014). Review of Garifuna Continuity in Land: Barranco Settlement and Land Use 1862 to 2000 by J. O. Palacio, C. J. Tuttle and J. R. Lumb. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 60(2), 143-145. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43488260>

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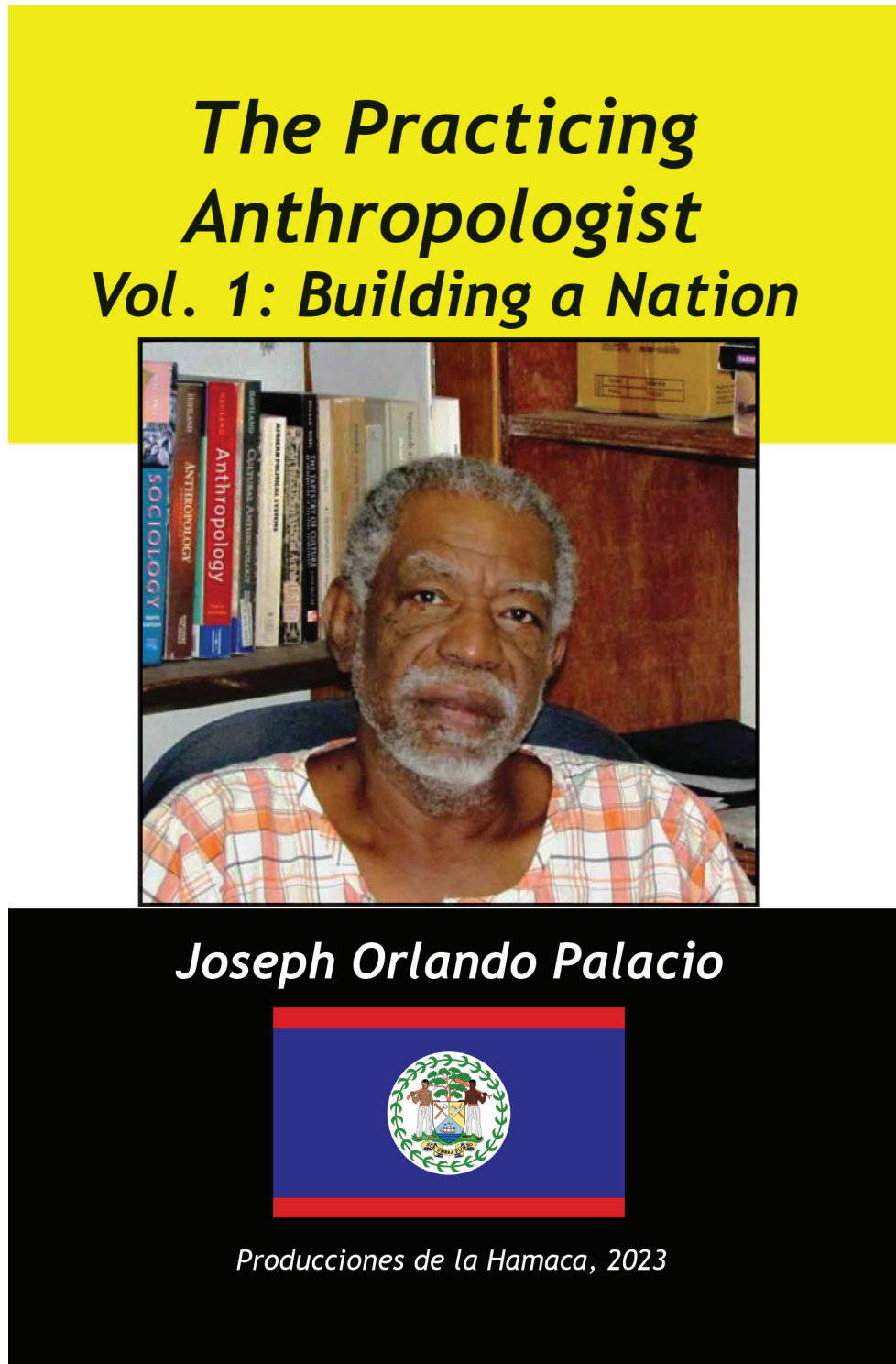
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**Figura 1**

Cover: *The Practicing Anthropologist*, Vol. 1: *Building a Nation* by *Joseph Orlando Palacio*





**Figura 2**

Cover: *The Practicing Anthropologist, Vol. 2: Cultural Diversity and Caribbean Indigenous Peoples* by Joseph Orlando Palacio

# ***The Practicing Anthropologist:***

## ***Volume 2: Cultural Diversity and Caribbean Indigenous Peoples***



***Joseph Orlando Palacio***



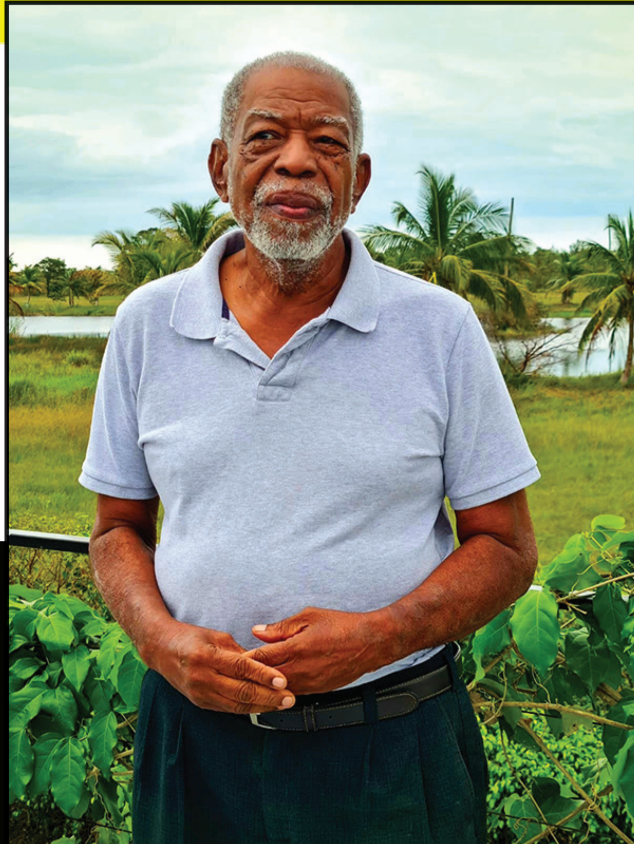
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**Figura 3**

Cover: *The Practicing Anthropologist*, Vol.3. Garifuna People and Barranco by *Joseph Orlando Palacio*

# ***The Practicing Anthropologist***

***Vol. 3: Garifuna Peoplehood  
and Barranco***



***Joseph Orlando Palacio***