GLOBALIZATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT SERIES

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By contrast, occupying the very top tier of looters would be the big state actors, like the Bush administration, looting the national budget for its illegal wars and accompanied by the war and disaster profiteers who are engorging themselves and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future but who, I admit, aren’t often photographed carrying away their billions in plastic garbage bags while running down the street. When people start talking about a shoot-to-kill policy for looters, aren’t they in danger of committing the crime of threatening the life of the president of the United States? We might want to think about why it is the petty thief who gets shot while these other looters simply get richer (hello Dick Cheney—I wanted a break from saying “Halliburton”).

Finally, to those who have said and continue to say that this isn’t about race or class, you simply aren’t paying attention. What is happening, of course, is about more than those social facts, but the existence of those social realities within a nation that allows itself to accommodate those realities will be rewarded with all the horrors brought on by the public’s inability to see what has been and continues to be made within the terms of that accommodation. We accept living within a world of unequal division of resources, a dispossession of the commons, described in chapter 1 of this volume. We accept living in a state that is intent upon remaking the world to its accommodation, the extension of empire, elaborated in chapter 3. We accept the tearing down of a material fabric of governmental responsibility for which we pay with our taxes, the abrogation of public responsibility discussed in chapter 2 of this volume. And we accept this in some significant part because class inequality and racial inequality are as American as apple pie. The politics of death are articulated in the life we deny the most vulnerable of our people and the life that is increasingly going to be denied to more and more of us.

NOTE
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CHAPTER 8
Disaster, Displacement, and Employment
Distortion of Labor Markets during Post-Katrina Reconstruction
GREGORY BUTTON AND ANTHONY OLIVER-SMITH

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast at the end of August 2005, it displaced well over 1 million people and by some estimates as many as 1.5 million people. The damage to businesses and communities was severe enough to result in a long-term evacuation of much of the labor force and resulted in what may have been the largest forcibly displaced population in this nation’s history. Unfortunately, at present, we only have a patchwork quilt of reports detailing how much this displacement affected individuals, their households, and the labor market in general. Only through a series of spotty government reports and unrelated microeconomic studies does a picture emerge, however vague, that illuminates for us the extent of the impact. As imperfect as this picture is, it reveals deeply disturbing questions about the long-term fate of many of the evacuees and workers in general. As the Economic Policy Institute declared in a January 2007 examination of unemployment among evacuees, “a large portion are still struggling to find work” (Economic Policy Institute 2007:2). It would appear that eighteen months after the catastrophe many victims of the storm are still struggling just to stay afloat, let alone reconstruct their lives.

In this chapter, we examine the displacement induced by Hurricane Katrina, and in particular the differential employment trends of diverse populations in the reconstruction process. The complexity of contemporary disasters and the displacements they cause are refracted into the process of reconstruction. One of the central issues in the aftermath of a disaster is employment. In this chapter we intend to explore the implications of the fact that contemporary disasters, made more complex by inequality and vulnerability, are uprooting large numbers of people, thereby distorting and restructuring labor markets, and often impeding the recovery process. Most of the literature characterizes disaster-induced displacement as temporary, suggesting that people eventually return. However, this is an oversimplification, as the debate on the term “environmental refugees” highlights questions of both causality and culpability. We will
examine the effects of displacement on refugees evacuees after their uprooting, as well as macro-level effects on labor markets and workers’ rights, by examining the case of Hurricane Katrina and referencing previous disasters. The distortions created in the post-Katrina labor markets by massive displacements of local people as well as vulnerable immigrant populations confer significant advantages to employers in both the price and the disciplining of labor in the current market-based recovery policies and strategies favored by local and national administrations.

In our discussion of Hurricane Katrina and displaced populations it is important to keep in mind the fact that many of the people forcibly displaced by Hurricane Katrina were members of ethnic populations who have a history of forced displacement. Ethnic groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Acadians (who we know today as Cajuns), and the Vietnamese were among these populations that have previously been forcibly uprooted. In the case of the middle-aged Vietnamese, they have suffered three forced displacements within their own lifetime. It is also important to note as Peacock et al. (1997) have observed, disaster recovery in the United States (and in many other nations) is primarily market-based. Such policies tend to exacerbate the consequences of the preexisting socioeconomic structure, increasing the vulnerability of minority households and thereby increasing the risk of recovery failure. Our in-depth examination of Hurricane Katrina provides a classic example of this process.

Surprisingly, there has been little formal exploration of this topic to date. In part, this failure may be due to the fact that there has been little attempt by scholars to pursue this topic, coupled with the fact that both government and international agencies have not systematically gathered the necessary data to sufficiently document the above-mentioned impacts of disaster and the process of recovery on workers. Admittedly, the massive displacement of the labor force in the wake of a disaster the size of Katrina creates enormous operational hurdles for the government agencies in both their data collection and estimation methodologies; however, in the case of Katrina it would also seem that the lack of the federal administration’s political will to provide fundamental answers to questions about where the 1.5 million evacuees went and what has happened to them over time calls into question the sincerity of their recovery effort. Moreover, even if we grant the administration the benefit of recognizing the enormity of this challenge, at the very least, their “inability” to do so illustrates the need for extraordinary information-gathering processes that need to be established in advance of a catastrophe in order to ensure the ability of federal agencies to change their statistic-gathering operational methodologies to adapt to the crisis as it unfolds.

**Disasters, Vulnerability, and Environmental Refugees**

Migration, whether permanent or temporary, has always been a traditional response or survival strategy of people confronting the prospect, impact, or aftermath of disasters (Hugo 1996). However, today, more than ever, the complex nature of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in the city of New Orleans bring with them an enormous potential for the uprooting of large numbers of people. The increasing complexity of disasters is rooted in the interplay of social and economic factors in the environment, exacerbating the vulnerability of both people and environments and intensifying their impacts when they occur. Disasters are, in fact, increasing in impact and scope through the combined effects of economic, social, demographic, ideological, and technological factors. Greater numbers of people are more vulnerable to natural and other hazards than ever before, due in part to increases in population, but more so to their location in dangerous areas. Indeed, much of this occupation of hazardous sites is due to forms of economic dislocation prior to the onset of any single disaster event (Stonich 1993; Wisner 2003).

Today, natural disasters, rather than unanticipated and unique events, are seen to be much more explainable in terms of the “normal” order of things, that is, the conditions of inequality and subordination in the society rather than the accidental geophysical features of a place. This perspective has shifted the focus away from the disaster event and toward the vulnerability of peoples embodied in the “ongoing societal and man-environment relations that pre-figure [disaster]” (Hewitt 1983:24–27). The concept of vulnerability refers to the totality of relationships in a given social situation producing the formation of a condition that, in combination with environmental forces, produces a disaster. Disaster risks and outcomes are thus largely socially produced. This more complex understanding of vulnerability and disasters enables researchers to analyze how social systems generate the conditions that place different kinds of people, often differentiated along axes of class, race, ethnicity, gender, or age, at different levels of risk from the same hazard and different forms of suffering from the same event.

To the degree that disasters force people to relocate either temporarily or permanently, disaster victims have been seen as a subset of the category of environmental refugees. There has been a recent debate over this issue with claims of millions of environmental refugees being produced versus counterclaims that the evidence is uneven, unconvincing, and counterproductive. There is little question that some disasters force people to migrate. The nuclear accident at Chernobyl forced many thousands of Ukrainians to migrate out of the contaminated zone. Had the disaster not occurred, there probably would not have been any significant out-migration. Such cases as Chernobyl with
widespread and long-lasting physical and economic danger seem to be occurring more frequently. The South Asian tsunami clearly displaced millions, and now Hurricane Katrina has uprooted more than 1 million people and left as many as hundreds of thousands permanently displaced.

Since the 1980s researchers have linked the issue of environmental change with human migration, explicitly designating as "environmental refugees" people who are forced to leave their homes, temporarily or permanently, due to the threat, impact, or effects of a hazard or environmental change (El-Hinnawi 1985). Myers (1997) has asserted that recent human-induced environmental change, such as desertification, deforestation, or soil erosion, compounded by natural and man-made disasters, could force as many as 50 million people to migrate from their homes by 2010.

Other researchers dispute the accuracy of the term "environmental refugee," finding it misleading. They attribute the displacement of people to a complex pattern of factors including political, social, economic, as well as environmental forces (Black 2001; Castles 2002; Wood 2001). Natural disasters are seen to cause temporary displacement, but not some idea of authentic, that is, permanent, migration. Indeed, if permanent migration does occur as the result of a disaster, it is seen as more the result of deficient responses of weak or corrupt states rather than the environment as expressed in the form of a natural hazard impact. Black’s (2001) critique that focusing on environmental factors as causes of migration often obscures the role of political and economic factors is well-taken, and it echoes the position held by most disaster researchers today. Focusing solely on agents reveals little about the political or economic factors that together with agents produce disasters or, for that matter, any forced migration that might ensue. But these objections, in turn, elide the fact that the environment, and its resources as well as its hazards, is always channeled for people through social, economic, and political factors, even in the best of times (Oliver-Smith 2002). It is equally important to remember here that a disaster is also no longer defined in terms of its event aspect only, but in terms of both the processes that set it in motion and the postevent processes of adaptation and adjustment in recovery and reconstruction.

DISASTER-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT, EMPLOYMENT, AND RECOVERY

When disasters damage or destroy communities, uprooting people, displacing them far from homes and jobs, the process of recovery is made doubly complex. Uprooted people generally face the daunting task of rebuilding not only personal lives, but also those relationships, networks, and structures that support people as individuals, which we understand as communities. The social destruction wrought by these phenomena takes place at both the individual level and at the community level. In some cases, survivors of these events re-settle themselves individually or as families in new environments, facing the challenges of integration in new areas. These events/processes often set people on the road, breaking up families and communities. Hurricane Mitch, which devastated Honduras in 1998, forced many people to leave their families to seek work in Mexico, Guatemala, and the United States. Thousands who remained behind were still living in provisional shelters more than two years later (Stansbury et al. 2001).

In other contexts, whole communities may be resettled. When a community is resettled, it is not simply lifted up and set down whole in a new site. In most cases the community is reconfigured in specific ways. Most resettlement projects, particularly in the developing world, directly or indirectly further two fundamental processes, the expansion of the state and integration into regional and national market systems. Neither of these processes of inclusion is particularly simple or straightforward, but in most cases, they produce a re-structuring of social, economic, and political relationships toward the priorities of the larger society. In many respects, resettlement does not necessarily destroy "local cultures" as much as it appropriates them and restructures them in terms of values and goals often originating from far beyond the local context. Such a process involves the reduction of local culture, society, and economy from all their varied expressions to a narrow set of institutions and activities that make them compatible with the purposes of the larger society (Garcia Canclini 1993).

Thus, many forms of reconstruction aid in the aftermath of displacement, whatever the cause, actually constitute development strategies. Varying according to the model and concept of development of the implementers, some postdisaster aid may be aimed at strengthening local institutions and reducing future vulnerability to hazards, while other strategies may be aimed at transforming communities into forms that are more compatible with larger market and state structures (Oliver-Smith 2006).

In general, however, the process of reconstruction has been approached largely as a material problem. The forms of aid and assistance that are marshaled to assist these unfortunate people have generally focused on issues of material need in the form of housing, nutrition, and health care. There is no denying that the often-excruciating material needs of the displaced must be addressed, but the question that is often not satisfactorily answered is how they should be addressed. Material aid is often donor designed as largely a transfer process and frequently is delivered in content and form in ways that compound the social and psychological effects of destruction and displacement by undermining self-esteem, compromising community integrity and identity, and creating patterns of dependency.
Employment in the aftermath of disaster will therefore be essential from both a material and a psychological standpoint. Employment provides needed income to replace or improve upon those personal and household needs not provided by aid, but it is also a form of action that enables people to return to being actors rather than being acted upon as disaster victims, which can become an essentially passive rather than active role. Disaster and displacement cause many people to lose the means of production, be it land, tools, or access to other resources, and they will be unable to resume normal activities until such resources are obtained. Also important will be the strategy of establishing the new livelihoods particularly if possible on the basis of traditional products, skills, and technology, thus allowing the people to continue with known practices particularly for the initial period of adjustment.

For displaced communities there may be difficult trade-offs between the social and cultural benefits gained by staying together, and the necessity of reconstituting economic resources. Tensions can also become acute when the displaced seek to relocate in existing communities and may compete with a dense host population for scarce social and economic resources such as jobs. However, until people resume a form of livelihood, they remain dependent on external resources, and reconstruction remains incomplete. The tensions between the need for jobs available locally and in the broader region and elsewhere and the goal of staying together must be negotiated in the process of reconstruction and vulnerability reduction.

Generally, the impact of disasters on labor markets is marked, sometimes limiting the supply of jobs because of economic dislocation, sometimes limiting the supply of labor because of displacement. Disaster-induced displacement basically alters the distance and time relationships between homes and jobs. Although much local displacement by disaster tends to be temporary, it may become permanent, particularly if the disaster permanently alters or destroys a local economic base. However, that outcome is usually not entirely the result of the agent alone, but rather government responses in the form of reconstruction plans and programs. The government decision not to reconstruct Homestead Air Force Base, a major regional employer, after Hurricane Andrew led to a permanent alteration of the economy of south Dade County and may account for some of the permanent migration that ensued. The Great Flood of 1927 in the lower Mississippi Valley displaced nearly 700,000 people, approximately 330,000 of whom were African Americans who were subsequently interned in 154 relief “concentration camps” where they were forced to work (www.mvd.usafe.army.mil/MRC-History-Center/gallery/flood/flood2.html). Although there were many reasons for African Americans to leave the South, the flood and its consequences, especially the forced labor in the camps, were the final motivation for migrating for thousands (Barry 1997:417).

When Hurricane Andrew hit Miami-Dade County in 1992, it inflicted nearly $30 billion worth of damage and temporarily displaced roughly 353,000 people. Forty thousand of the displaced (roughly 11 percent) permanently migrated. But, of the 40,000 who migrated, about half (20,000) moved only about a half-hour’s drive north, sparking a population boom in Plantation and other Broward County communities. The net loss of 20,000 was soon outstripped by people whose desire to move to Florida was not deterred by the hurricane (Gainesville Sun 2004).

Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras and Nicaragua in late fall 1998, killing an estimated 11,000 people, destroying basic food and export crops, and crippling infrastructure. The disaster in Honduras produced more than 6,000 dead and 2 million affected people, many left homeless and jobless, and forced to migrate. It is impossible to tell exactly how many people migrated out to La Mosquitia, the last relatively unimpacted rain forest of Central America. Although little data is available, Honduran farmers marginalized to steep hillsides first by the expansion of cattle ranching, shrimp mariculture, commercial melon and banana production, and subsequently to La Mosquitia by the ecological devastation of Hurricane Mitch, likely faced uprooting again as they encroached upon indigenous reserves and protected areas of that rainforest region. These unfortunate people would be triple losers.

An interesting historical note: The impact of Hurricane Mitch and inward migration into the City of New Orleans is not the first occurrence of its kind to affect the city. Johnson (1992) reports that in the wake of the great fire of 1788, the availability of construction jobs probably brought many free people of color into the city. The fire destroyed 856 buildings, or 80 percent of the French colonial structure (Campanella 2006). Johnson notes that in 1785 there were only 563 free people of color living in New Orleans, but by 1803 as many as 1,500 free people of color were living in the city, an increase he speculates was largely due to the employment opportunities brought about by the fire.

Disasters frequently become the outcome of unresolved development problems that produce a particular kind of relationship between natural or physical hazards and the organization and structure of society. Development processes have in many cases led to increases in vulnerability and accentuated impacts of disasters, leading to cases of forced migration. Hurricane Mitch was both the outcome and result of a series of intersecting forces, one of which was rural-to-urban migration, and the trigger event for another series of processes that produced the forced migration of many thousands of people whose multidimensional vulnerability left them after Mitch with few options but to migrate. The development policies that had been implemented over the previous fifty years had led the Honduran environment to the brink of collapse. Hurricane Mitch
When the cleanup of the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill was privatized, the labor market in some of the affected coastal communities was disrupted and radically rearranged by the hiring practices of Exxon and its subcontractor, VECO. The starting wage was set at $19.95 an hour. These high wages had several dislodging effects. First, thousands of workers from the lower forty-eight states migrated to Alaska seeking work. Many Alaskans resented the intrusion of these “carpetbaggers,” who were, in their view, depriving them of jobs that they as disaster “victims” thought they were entitled to. Second, because of the high wages, many people living in the coastal communities abandoned their employment with the hopes of getting rich. In many cases this meant that the personnel whose roles were most vital to a community (counsellors, teachers, nurses, harbor workers, road crews and maintenance workers, police officers, etc.) during a time of crisis were no longer available to assist communities in their response and recovery efforts at a time their services were needed the most. Third, because cleanup workers were hired in a seemingly arbitrary manner, there was growing resentment over who was or who was not hired, thereby exacerbating social conflict. Social tensions also increased within communities and families because some people felt that working for Exxon and its subcontractor was like working for the Vichy government. (After France’s military defeat in 1940, the new French government, the Vichy regime, willingly collaborated with Nazi Germany.) Siblings, crew members, coworkers, and others fell into fractious relations that in some cases lasted years after the disaster.

Moreover, because some individuals were able to make enormous amounts of money in various ways during the cleanup, the social hierarchy was disrupted. The resultant redistribution of wealth meant, for instance, in the case of a fishing community, that people who were fairly new to the fishing industry and who had arrived many years after those more established were suddenly thrust into more advantageous positions within the industry. This occurred by virtue of the fact that they could purchase the latest state-of-the-art equipment and larger boats more easily than their competitors.

In the native communities these wages altered the social hierarchy in different ways. First, it was not uncommon to find villages in which the only people left behind were the very young and the very old, which resulted at times in neglect and increased vulnerability for those already vulnerable. Second, the community hierarchy was radically rearranged when contractors paid younger individuals higher wages or placed them in supervisory roles, thereby dislodging the village elders from their traditional rank and status. Natives also contended that the contractors were biased against natives and provided the best wages and working conditions to nonnatives. Finally, in both native and non-native villages, residents employed in the cleanup effort were often absent from their households and communities for long periods of time while they worked in remote cleanup locations, thereby placing additional stress on families and communities during a time of severe crisis (Button 1993).

Disasters and International Migration
Disasters have influenced international migration as well. It is difficult to tell exactly between Hurricane Mitch and the Salvadoran earthquakes of January and February of 2001 how many Central Americans joined the international migrant stream in search of employment in the United States. In December of 1998, the U.S. government issued temporary protected status (TPS) to roughly 86,000 Hondurans and Nicaraguans. Deportation hearings were also suspended temporarily for Salvadorans and Guatemalans, and after the earthquakes, Salvadorans were granted TPS also (Mahler and Ugrina 2006). Another indication is that from November of 1998, just after the hurricane, to January of 1999, U.S. agents along the Texas border caught 6,555 people described as “other than Mexicans,” almost all of them Central Americans, an 86 percent increase over the previous year. There is no telling how many got through undetected. Mexico also caught and expelled 31,995 migrants, a 70 percent increase (McConahay 2000).

In one specific case, an organization referred to as “the Molina Organization” smuggled approximately 200 impoverished young Honduran females, some as young as fourteen, into the United States between December of 1998 and May of 2002. Promised jobs as waitresses and housekeepers in Fort Worth and Dallas, Texas, for an undisclosed fee, they were kept in debt bondage for their passage to the United States and maintenance and forced to work as bar girls and prostitutes (Statement of Jane Boyle, U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary 2003). Effects of these migrations on local labor markets are clearly evident in the widespread displacement following Hurricane Katrina, to which we now return for an in-depth examination.

HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE DISPLACED
Following Hurricane Katrina, major population displacement and structural damage severely reduced employment over the following year. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Monthly Labor Review (2006), over the year changes in employment indicate that employment in St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana, was down by nearly 40 percent in September 2005 from September 2004. In nearby Jefferson and Orleans parishes the employment was down roughly 25 percent. Employment continued to fall sharply after the hurricane and remains dramatically below its August 2005 level. By June 2006, nonfarm payroll employment in the New Orleans metro area was 30 percent below the
level a year earlier. After Hurricane Katrina the unemployment rate for Louisiana increased sharply to 12.1 percent. By December 2005 it began to drop and by June 2006 was almost at its pre-Katrina level. In the New Orleans metro area the unemployment rate rose to 17.7 percent in September 2005 and started falling in December, and by June 2006 it was at 7.2 percent, a rate slightly higher than a year earlier. Any way you look at it, Hurricane Katrina struck a severe blow to the regional economy as the data on Mississippi below attests. It is important to keep in mind that these statistics must be viewed in light of the fact that they do not include the tens of thousands of unemployed evacuees scattered across the nation.

In the State of Mississippi, employment levels in Jackson, Harrison, and Hancock counties declined by approximately 9 percent in September 2005 from the previous September. Employment continued to fall until February 2006, when it returned to its prehurricane level; however, in the Gulfport-Biloxi metro area it was down more than 19 percent in the year ending June 2006. The unemployment rate after the hurricane did not rise quite as high as in Louisiana, rising to 10.4 percent and dropping to pre-Katrina levels by June 2006. In September 2005 the unemployment rate in the Gulfport-Biloxi metro area rose to 22.0 percent. It fell to 12.5 percent in June 2006 but remained significantly higher than the rate a year earlier.

The national data on the evacuees is even more imprecise because the data gathered do not account for all those who were displaced. It is important to note that people living in hotels or shelters, who constitute a large majority of the evacuees, were not included in the scope of the survey. This is significant not only because of the great numbers of evacuees who were excluded from the study, but also because it is safe to assume that evacuees living in such conditions were among the poorest and most vulnerable. A document of their conditions is only recorded, at best, piecemeal by select researchers who were able to secure funding.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, based on information collected from October 2005 to June 2006, approximately 1 million people aged sixteen years and older evacuated their August 2005 residences for at least some period of time. For these evacuees the Bureau reports that the unemployment rate was 15.4 percent. It is important to note that that 58.7 percent of the evacuees were considered in the labor force; that is, either employed or looking for work. Black evacuees were reported to be five times more likely to be unemployed. Their labor force participation rates during this period were also lower. According to the information the Bureau gathered on evacuees, by June 2006 the unemployment rate was 13.4 percent, and the labor force participation rate had risen to 61.8 percent (Monthly Labor Review and Kosanovich 2006).

Nongovernmental, private research reports on the conditions of evacuees in various parts of the nation provide us with a more fine-grained analysis of their situation. Unfortunately, such studies do not exist for all the major areas of the country in that evacuees are living. They are representative of the enormous challenges the evacuees face. One such study conducted by a team from Rice University that issued a report in September 2006 provides us with some insights about the conditions of the evacuees in Houston, Texas, where approximately 120,000 evacuees remained at the time and remain until this day (Wilson and Stein 2006). Their unemployment remained a major problem for the evacuees in the study. According to this report less than 20 percent were employed and three-quarters of them earned less than $15,000 a year. Nearly half of them had no health insurance, and 98 percent of them were black. Sixty percent of the respondents reported that prior to Hurricane Katrina they were employed. Employment and housing were the two biggest challenges to these dislocated populations that, as we will demonstrate, confronted those who returned to their former communities and those who in a different migration sought work in the afflicted regions of the Gulf Coast.

Many of the evacuees attribute some of their employment difficulties to transportation problems. Houston is the fourth-largest city in the country and is a huge sprawling metro area that is not easily navigated by public transportation. In interviews conducted at the Houston Astrodome in September 2005, evacuees were queried about their met and unmet needs (Button 2005–2006). During the course of these in-depth interviews, when evacuees were asked what were some of the greatest challenges that they faced, many replied that they had great difficulty getting around the city seeking assistance and looking for employment. Some stated that while they thought they would stay in Houston for a while, they worried about how they would negotiate such a sprawling metro area.

These same concerns were also expressed by evacuees living in Austin, Texas, in February 2006, who told of the enormous difficulties of getting around a large urban area (Button 2005–2006). In this case their plight was made more difficult by the fact that when they were assigned housing by the city authorities, most of the housing that was available was on the periphery of the city. In some cases some of the available housing they were placed in was not even conveniently located to public transportation. The catch-22 for the evacuees was that if they were somehow lucky enough to purchase a car, once they registered it the federal government viewed them as permanently relocated and disqualified them from many relief benefits—including housing vouchers (Button forthcoming).

The plight of evacuees is also made evident in a major study by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (2006), which conducted a survey in...
May and June 2006. Among other things, the study clearly demonstrates that the evacuees made limited progress in recovering from Hurricane Katrina. Seventy-one percent of the evacuees reported being employed prior to the hurricane, whereas in May 2006 only 30 percent reported being employed. According to the responses, 87 percent of those employed before Katrina worked full-time and 13 percent worked part-time. Another study conducted by the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University (Abramson et al. 2007) investigated the conditions of evacuees in Mississippi. The study refers to what they term as the “poverty penalty.” According to its findings, households that were termed either working class or working poor at the time Hurricane Katrina struck were the most vulnerable to severe economic loss. This is evidenced by the fact that “53% of households with an annual income below $10,000 lost all salaried jobs in the household after the hurricane, compared to 15% of the households with an annual income above $20,000” (p. 2).

In yet another study, by Elliot and Pais (2006), which echoes some of the conclusions of the Columbia study, race and class are shown to play a significant role in the vulnerability of evacuees and their ability to recover. This study demonstrates that “all else being equal,” black workers from the City of New Orleans were 3.8 times more likely to report losing their prehurricane jobs than white workers. Low-income blacks were reported to be especially vulnerable. Those who had a household income of $10,000 to $20,000 were twice as likely to have lost their employment than blacks with higher household incomes ranging from $40,000 to $50,000. In another words, low-income blacks, not just low-income workers in general or blacks in general, were much more likely to lose their jobs in a disaster. All these studies confirm earlier studies that observed that preexisting inequities are often reinforced and exaggerated after a disaster occurs (Bolin and Bolten 1986; Bolin and Stanford 1998; Hewitt 1997; Peacock et al. 1997; Tierney 1988). As Peacock and Zhang (2005:2) in their study of Hurricane Andrew convincingly demonstrate, “minority populations and marginalized groups are often the hardest hit, and yet tend to be excluded from post-disaster decision-making processes and have limited access to reconstruction and recovery resources.”

THE EXPLOITATION OF WORKERS DURING RECONSTRUCTION

Many of the evacuees hoped to eventually return home and find employment in the reconstruction efforts along the Gulf Coast. A coalition of low-income groups in New Orleans, Community Labor United, issued a statement saying, “we are calling for evacuees from our community to actively participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans” (Klein 2005:15). These hopes were soon vanquished by government practices and the privatization of the reconstruction effort, which led to substantial labor abuses due to lack of government oversight. The all too common practice of using national and transnational labor in the reconstruction period following disasters, and the exploitation of labor in general, is amply illustrated in the case of Hurricane Katrina. While over a million evacuees left the afflicted Gulf Coast region, several thousand Latino workers (as well as other, smaller ethnic groups), mostly from Texas and Florida, poured into New Orleans and the Gulfport-Biloxi area looking for reconstruction work. The Los Angeles Times ran a cartoon showing an African American on foot with suitcases leaving New Orleans as a Mexican worker with tools in hand walked toward the city (cited in Donato and Hakimzadeh 2006).

This worker migration to New Orleans was triggered by President Bush’s actions on September 8, 2005, when he lifted the 1931 Davis-Bacon Act, which required federal contractors to pay at least the average regional wage. Following this act, the Department of Homeland Security temporarily suspended the requirement of employers to require employees to prove their U.S. citizenship—supposedly to assist hurricane survivors who may have lost their identity papers as a result of the catastrophe—thus opening the door to immigrants and undocumented workers to be exploited. The Department of Labor, following Bush’s executive order, lifted federal wage restrictions for sixty days. The Department also suspended (September 9, 2005) Executive Order 11246, which requires federal contractors to submit written affirmative action and nondiscrimination plans that would ensure equal opportunity for employment (because of intense pressure from civil rights groups the order was lifted December 9, 2005). Labor conditions were also compromised when on August 20, 2005, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration suspended the enforcement of job safety and health standards in hurricane-afflicted counties. By November 3, 2005, the provisions of the Davis-Bacon Act were basically reinstated because of political pressure. Whether some of the federal regulations regarding labor conditions were maintained or reinstated, it can be argued that the above actions created a climate for worker exploitation.

These actions also set the stage for the use of undocumented and documented workers displacing local citizens and evacuees from having a preferred status in gaining reconstruction jobs and thereby depriving them of resuming the role of actors rather than disaster victims, as well as ensuring to some significant degree that they remain dependent on external aid for assistance. According to the provisions of the Stafford Act, preferential treatment is supposed to go to local workers following a disaster; however, this statement is qualified by something of a loophole that states, “to the extent feasible and practicable.”

On October 18, 2005, the Times-Picayune (Varney 2005) ran a front-page story titled, in large, bold caps, “NUEVO ORLEANS?” in which it reported that a “huge influx” of Latino workers, mostly from Texas, composed the majority
of workers on job sites. Mayor Nagin, in his awkward attempt to say that locals should be hired first, drew strong criticism from civil rights groups when he questioned, “How do I ensure New Orleans is not overrun by Mexican workers?”

Unfortunately, there are no official government estimates about how many Latinos migrated to the “Gulf Opportunity Zone.” The president of the Gulf Coast Latin American Association told the press that by November 2005, 30,000 Latinos had migrated (Donato and Hakimzadeh 2006). New Orleans locals were incensed over the hiring of nonlocals for reconstruction projects and the lowering of hourly wages. One black worker at Mayor Nagin’s first town hall meeting after the hurricane yelled, “They are bringing in Mexicans and expecting us to work for the same money. Is slavery over or what?” (Campo-Flores 2005a:1). In New Orleans rumors abounded about illegal workers being brought in from Mexico, Central America, and other parts of the country to do cleanup and construction work. However, one comprehensive report concluded that the majority (87 percent) of undocumented workers who went to New Orleans seeking work had already been living in the country within the six months prior (Fletcher, Phuong, and Patrick 2006).

African Americans began alleging that contractors were biased toward hiring Latino workers over black people. Stories circulated about how some contractors had allegedly called the National Immigration Service just days before payday and reported their undocumented workers in order to avoid having to pay them (Button 2005–2006). In a city in which the pre-Katrina Hispanic population was just 3 percent, one suddenly witnessed the unprecedented sight in New Orleans of large groups of Latino men, along with some African American men in gas station parking lots, in front of Home Depot, as well as other areas around the city, waiting to be hired by subcontractors. The largest daily gathering of waiting workers was in Lee Circle, where even the casual passerby could see workers living in nearby devastated homes and cars. In Spanish-language papers in Texas and Florida, ads suddenly appeared offering jobs to the Hispanic community. As rumors of these hiring practices spread to evacuees living in Houston, Dallas, Austin, and Atlanta, there was growing resentment among the evacuees that they, the locals, who had lost their homes, their jobs, and in some cases their family members to Hurricane Katrina, were being denied the opportunity for employment in rebuilding their neighborhoods and city (Button 2005–2006). One evacuee in Austin stated that such practices were just another example of the “racism of the Bush administration and contractors” (Button 2005–2006:116). Another evacuee, temporarily living in Austin, expressed the sentiment that “they [Latinos] will take over our jobs and homes by the time we return and we will have nothing” (Button 2005–2006:116).

Reports of similar practices began occurring in Mississippi as well. An AP report (Pritchard 2005) stated that in Gulfport “several dozen men living in makeshift bunks in a hanger-like building said they were owed tens of thousands of dollars.” One of the authors talked with workers living without heat or electricity in many of the tent cities that sprang up around New Orleans, who repeatedly told the same story of having to purchase their tents and then pay $200–$300 dollars a month rent. They also complained that they were being charged money to take cold showers (Button 2005–2006).

According to one source (Browne-Dianis et al. 2006) employer nonpayment is not a crime under Mississippi law, and because there is not a state labor department it is difficult to actually gauge the extent of the problem. While the State of Louisiana does have a Department of Labor, it does not have a section that deals with wage claims because it doesn’t have a minimum wage law. In fact, according to a report issued by the New Orleans Worker Justice Coalition, workers had few avenues of recourse to report any of the abuses they were suffering because in Louisiana the U.S. Department of Labor had only four bilingual investigators and but one in Mississippi according to the same report.

Troubled by these reports, The Immigrant Justice Project issued a report, “Broken Levees, Broken Promises: New Orleans Migrant Workers in Their Own Words” (2006). Here is what some workers had to say:

“I am here every morning at 6 a.m. to wait for work. There’s nothing reliable. With each new job, there is a new risk of not getting paid.”

“I have been cheated by three employers in two months. I did the work. I am only asking what’s fair—that I be paid for work I’ve done.”

“It makes one feel cheated—what they have done. After all any human being that has been exploited feels bad.”

“When our bosses talked with us it was like they were talking to animals.”

Then in February 2006, the Immigrant Justice Project filed two lawsuits in federal court. One was brought against the Balfour USA Group, Inc. and its subcontractors. This major disaster reconstruction company was hired to restore major public facilities such as the Tulane Hospital. The suit alleged that the workers were often forced to work seven days a week, up to twelve hours a day, to remove mold and other toxins from buildings, and that Balfour “unlawfully used a subcontractor system to avoid paying any overtime to the workers” (Southern Poverty Law Center 2006:1). Balfour’s response was unexpected and revealing. Instead of fighting the suit with further litigation, it conducted an internal review of its subcontractors’ practices and concluded that some of its subcontractors had not been paying overtime to its workers. In September 2006, the company settled the lawsuit with the Southern Poverty Law Center and reached an agreement to ensure workers received full wages (Southern Poverty Law Center 2006).
The other suit was filed against the LVI Environmental Services of New Orleans, Inc., which was hired to clean public schools, for also using a subcontractor to avoid paying wages. The suit further alleged that one of its major subcontractors, D&L, Environmental, Inc. "failed to pay many of its migrant workers anything much for their labor." According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, large contractors that have either Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or other government contracts have been using a subcontracting system in order to increase profits by cheating workers. Similar allegations were made against a firm owned by Halliburton, KBR, which has a $12 million contract to clean a navy base in Gulfport, Mississippi. After waiting many weeks to be paid, a number of workers left the job site (Pritchard 2005). Halliburton/KBR had not acknowledged having any undocumented workers cleaning military bases despite reports to the contrary. While most subcontractors working with the firm refuse to acknowledge their connection and discuss working conditions, at least one contractor has admitted his connection to KBR and his use of workers at a naval base. The Texas-based Halliburton/KBR insisted that it maintained a strict Code of Business Conduct that all its subcontractors are expected to follow (Lovato 2005). U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu, responding to complaints that several Louisiana electricians who had been hired to work at the Belle Chasse Naval Air Station were being replaced by workers receiving less pay, asked the Immigration and Customs Agency to investigate rumors that the electricians were being replaced by undocumented workers. In response to her request, immigration agents temporarily held 100 workers at the base. The workers had been hired by BE&K, a subcontractor hired by Halliburton (Alpert 2005).

KBR, a subsidiary of Halliburton, received a billion dollar, noncompetitive contract from FEMA to conduct various tasks in the cleanup effort. Unfortunately, this kind of contractual agreement was the rule and not the exception in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In September 2005, 51 percent of the total FEMA contracts were awarded without full and open competition—they were "no-bid" contracts. By October, this percentage increased to 93 percent. Even as late as December 2006, 57 percent of the contract dollar value was with non-competitive contracts. According to a House of Representatives report (August 2006) on waste and abuse, by June of 2006 more than $10.6 billion in contracts had been awarded and only 30 percent of these contracts were open and competitive. In most of these instances there was excessive reliance on subcontractors, thus contracts were often set up with multiple layers of subcontractors between the government and the subcontractor that performed the work of reconstruction. This type of arrangement was highly inefficient and expensive to the taxpayer because it multiplied expenses unnecessarily and made oversight more difficult. According to the Government Accounting Office, FEMA lacked the necessary staff for proper oversight. The most blatant and costly example of how much these multiple layers of contractors cost the taxpayer is the "blue roof" contracts. These contracts, which were to place blue tarps on damaged roofs, had so many subcontractors involved that according to a report in the Washington Post (March 20, 2006) the contracts were in some instances 1,700 percent higher than the actual costs. In another report, it stated that taxpayers ended up paying on the average $2,480 per roof for a job that should have cost $300 (A. Davis 2005). While the contractors and subcontractors made enormous profits and benefited from the suspension of labor and health and safety regulations, the workers gained little in comparison—and at times nothing—when the subcontractors left town without paying their wages.

The fact that so many of these major federal contractors and subcontractors were based in regions other than the most damaged areas also generated controversy and resentment. In fact, FEMA awarded only 18 percent of contract dollars to the hardest hit states. Just as controversial was the fact that Homeland Security awarded billions of dollars of money through no-bid contracts. Further fueling resentment, FEMA awarded less than 2 percent of the contract dollars to minority businesses. Nor did the federal government enforce its local-contractor and local-employee preferences that established guidelines to ensure contracts went to local businesses or local workers.

Concerned by mounting reports of abuse circulating on street corners and in the local media, the Payson Center for International Development and
Technology Transfer at Tulane University and the International Human Rights Law Clinic and the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley, launched an investigation. In June 2006 they issued a study of workers’ rights violations in the reconstruction of New Orleans. Key informants told the researchers that the “employers had a bias in hiring Latino immigrants over African-Americans.” These key informants also said that some of the employers preferred Latinos because in their opinion, “Latinos have a reputation for industriousness and a willingness to tolerate the difficult and uncomfortable working conditions involved in debris removal and demolition work” (Fletcher, Phuong, and Patrick 2006:11).

The same study also found that 98 percent of the workers were men and almost half the workers were Latino, of which 54 percent were undocumented, which means that one-quarter of the workforce was undocumented. The study also found that because federal and state authorities failed to properly monitor the worksites, both types of workers were made more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Some workers stated that they had to work under dangerous conditions in which there were potentially harmful substances, and they were not provided adequate protective equipment. One of the authors actually witnessed, on several occasions, Mexican workers removing insulation and other toxic materials without respirators, gloves, or protective clothing.

Undocumented workers also received discriminatory treatment. A third of the undocumented workers claim they received less money than they expected, compared to the same complaint by 15 percent of the documented workers. Undocumented workers were similarly at risk for exploitation in obtaining payment. Whereas 13 percent of the documented workers complained of difficulty in getting paid, 28 percent of the undocumented workers made the same claim. Undocumented workers were also more vulnerable to exploitation than documented workers in other ways as well. For instance, undocumented workers tended to be younger. The mean age of the documented worker was forty-one years old compared to thirty years old for the undocumented workers. According to the findings of the report only 55 percent of the undocumented workers had an education above primary school compared to 96 percent of the documented workers and U.S. citizens. Moreover, wages for the undocumented workers were lower than those of documented workers. The average hourly wage of an undocumented worker was $10.00 compared to $16.50 for documented workers (even when adjusted for the type of work performed).

Workers in the survey reported that they often did not receive additional pay for working more than a forty-hour week (Button 2005–2006). Only 29 percent of the workers surveyed reported being paid for a longer workweek. When workers did receive more pay, undocumented workers tended to just receive the normal hourly wage for additional work whereas 74 percent of the documented workers frequently reported receiving 1.5 times their normal wages.

If the above conditions for documented and undocumented workers were not bad enough, there were also reports of human trafficking of foreign workers from as far away as Southeast Asia. Because of the circumstances surrounding the conditions of their visa, their language barriers, and their lack of familiarity with the customs and laws of the country, these individuals were even more vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. The workers were officially designated “nonimmigrant workers” who were allowed limited entry into the country. According to this conditional status, their sponsoring employers could only hire them if they could prove there were no U.S. citizens willing and able to do the work for which they were hired. Moreover, their stay in the country was conditional on the fact that the foreign workers must work for their sponsors. If they were fired or quit, for whatever reasons, they were not allowed to work for anyone else and were required to leave the country or be subject to deportation or imprisonment. One group of workers from Thailand was forced to live in a New Orleans hotel that was filthy and had no “electricity, lights, hot water or potable water.” In the end, the guest workers were not paid (Greenhouse 2007). These conditions alone provide an ideal opportunity for exploitation by their sponsor. Many of these workers were solicited by contractors who lied to them about the location and nature of the work they would be doing, the wages they would receive, and their living conditions.

There are reports of sponsors seizing the workers’ passports, locking them in their living quarters, and threatening them with violence or deportation. While there appear to be no reliable numbers of how many trafficked workers were brought to the Gulf Coast, we do know from several sources that such practice occurred. From affidavits taken from some of these workers we can get an idea of their plight. One worker from Thailand complained that he and his companions were detained in their hotel and not allowed to leave except to go to work. Workers telling similar stories also stated that if they had to purchase food or do other errands, they were never allowed to go anywhere without an escort. Other workers told of being forced to live with many other workers in small quarters. Some legal documents allege that workers who were recruited to work as agricultural workers in North Carolina ended up in New Orleans instead, while others reported that their contractors disappeared and did not pay them their wages (Brown-Dianis et al. 2006).

Workers who migrated to the Gulf Coast often shared similar sociodemographic characteristics of many of the hardest hit evacuees who faced employment and housing shortages in their new temporary locations. Whether people moved away from the hurricane-affected areas, or toward them, they
were uprooted, driven by poverty, and faced many of the same systemic structural inequalities in their displacement. The specificities of their struggle to survive may have varied, but the underlying denominators of race and class, among the poor, largely shaped the challenges they faced.

**THE PLIGHT OF WORKERS IN GENERAL IN NEW ORLEANS**

Regardless of whether the workers in New Orleans were migrants, returning evacuees, or people who had managed to stay in place, they all faced tremendous barriers to affordable housing and safe, stable employment. Employment and housing were the largest obstacles to all workers—just as they were to the evacuees. Finding both housing and employment proved to be almost impossible. As one African American man stated: “It seems you can either live in this city or work in this city, but you can’t do both” (Browne-Dianis et al. 2006). The difficulty in finding housing led to, among other things, the break up of families. Many returning evacuees left their families behind in Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta because of the housing shortage. In many cases, their spouses left these cities to find work in northern cities, leaving their children behind in the care of relatives or friends. It was not uncommon to hear evacuees recount how their families were spread all over the country (Button 2005–2006). Families were inclined to leave their children behind even if a spouse returned with them to New Orleans because of the lack of available schooling. Ironically, even at the time of this submission in March 2007, one of the major reasons why so few schools have reopened is because the lack of housing in the city has discouraged teachers from returning and the recruitment of new teachers. At the same time Latinos and other “migrant” workers complained of having to leave their families behind as well.

When businesses tried to reopen, the greatest predicament they faced was finding a stable workforce that had safe and reliable housing. While there existed a labor pool eager to work, workers could not return without housing. Some employers such as a supermarket in the Uptown area enticed workers with free temporary living space in air-conditioned tractor-trailers in their parking lot (Button 2005–2006). In the first weeks, and even months of recovery, many businesses were open only limited hours because they could not find enough workers to cover regular hours of business. Returning evacuees were confronted with inflated motel and hotel fees. Apartments that normally went for $200–$300 a month were going for $1,000 a month. Just as evacuees in other states faced housing costs far in excess of their previous living conditions in New Orleans and along the Coast, returning evacuees and migrant workers were faced with price gouging and steep rents.

Many evacuees and workers slept in flooded and molding abandoned buildings, bombed-out vehicles, or in the open in parks. Tent cities sprang up over the metro area. Some workers lived in FEMA shelters in distant communities, spending long hours commuting to work. Thousands of workers who had lived in public housing could not return to the housing projects even if they were untouched by the flooding and storm, as many of them were, because the federal government closed all the projects. People who had lived in public housing who could afford other housing were often stigmatized and faced housing discrimination. Other evacuees were faced with the dilemma of having to continue to pay the mortgage for their storm-damaged or flooded homes and pay rent on a place to live while they waited for assistance, insurance settlements, or a FEMA trailer.

While 112,000 low-income homes were damaged by the disaster, many of the 7,100 public housing apartments were not damaged or not damaged beyond repair (Quigley 2005). Local, state, and federal authorities were opposed to reopening the housing projects, and many livable units were boarded up with steel doors within days after the storm. Some politicians saw the situation as an opportunity to do away with public housing in the metro area. Richard Baker, a Louisiana state congressman boldly declared, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did” (M. Davis 2005). Actually neither God nor “Mother Nature” can be blamed since most of the units were unscathed. The New Orleans City Council president, Oliver Thomas, was just as harsh in his comments about public housing residents. He stated the city didn’t want “them” back unless they were going to work: “We don’t need soap opera watchers all day.” His message was if you want to reclaim your apartments, you’d better want to work (Salvidge 2006).

What Thomas seemed to ignore is that the majority of the residents were children, mothers, the disabled, and the elderly. People who had lived in public housing and could not return and could afford other housing and were discouraged from returning to the city. Those who did return were stigmatized by the statements made in the press by local and state politicians. Depicted as drug dealers and parasites living off the state, they faced housing and job discrimination when they tried to make their way back into the city. Some observers see the plan as “racially discriminatory.” Bill Quigley of the Loyola University Law School, who is representing the poor in a lawsuit to stop the plan, has stated, “This is a government sanctioned diaspora of New Orleans’ poorest African-American citizens” (Cass and Whoriskey 2006:1).

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) expressed a different rationale for demolishing more than 5,000 housing units within the city. They described the projects as dehumanizing and emblematic of urban poverty. However, in this case, most of the housing projects did not resemble the dense housing projects of the 1960s. Rather, many were some of the best housing projects ever built in the country. Most were built on a human
scale and were architecturally compatible with the surrounding historic neighborhoods. Moreover, some of these buildings were very well designed and constructed with a quality of materials that could not be replicated today. The brick, tile, and ironwork bespeak the aspiring middle-class rather than urban poor, and the layout of the grounds and landscaping was just as impressive before they were paved over by HUD (see also Oursousoff 2006).

Nevertheless, HUD is demolishing four of the city's largest housing projects in favor of building new developments with private investors, thereby providing yet another opportunity for private capital to profit from the storm and also preventing the poorest of the evacuees from being able to return home. Unfortunately, programs like Louisiana's Road Home program, which provides assistance to returning evacuees, is only for the middle-class. Renters do not qualify for assistance, demonstrating once again that recovery funds often reinforce marginalization (Girard and Peacock 1997).

To many residents this approach reminds them of what happened in 2002 when the city demolished the St. Thomas housing project and built the "mixed income" River Garden Housing. Only 25 percent of the new units were for affordable housing and the rest were for market-rate units. Part of the "revitalized" land was used to build the first Orleans Parish Wal-Mart. To some, the revitalization project ended up looking more like corporate profiteering than improved housing opportunities for the poor.

To some degree this housing policy followed the pattern of previous disasters in the United States. In general, it has been noted by other researchers that there is usually a reluctance to replace low-rent housing after a disaster (Phillips 1993). This was definitely the case in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew as well. The housing shortage that followed this South Florida disaster was increased by the increased lack of availability of low-income housing and led to, as in the case of Hurricane Katrina, landlords raising rents and discriminating against the very poor similar to what has happened in New Orleans (Peacock et al. 1997).

CONCLUSION
The case of Hurricane Katrina powerfully illustrates, once again, the fact that low-income and minority households and neighborhoods can, in the wake of a disaster, suffer a decline in their socioeconomic status, suffer increased vulnerability, and even fail to regain their predisaster living status (Bolin and Stanford 1998; Peacock et al. 1997). Because these populations lack access to the kinds of resources that can buffer the impact of the disaster, they cannot recover their losses or escape discrimination and gain equity in the recovery process. As a result these populations are pushed more deeply into a hole from which it is increasingly difficult to escape. The conservative market-based recovery policies tend to only reinforce the preexisting failures of the sociocultural system. The situation is further exacerbated, as we have seen above, when those few progressive, preexisting government policies that exist in the labor sector are either suspended or not enforced.

Many of the emerging disaster trends and characteristics that have been noted for Katrina and other disasters will very likely increase the number and scale of forced migrations in the relatively near future. The combination of increasing population, population density, increasing poverty, and occupation of hazardous sites has accentuated vulnerability to both natural and technological hazards and increases the probability of forced migrations. Technology has also vastly increased the numbers of hazards to which populations are exposed. When socio-natural disasters trigger technological disasters, the resulting complex process may force people to migrate because the disaster impacts, in combination with local environmental contamination, make the environment uninhabitable. While many of the changes associated with increasing state and market integration have established more resilient infrastructures in some regions of the world, they have also frequently undermined traditional adaptations of rural populations to natural hazards. In addition, the effects of global climate changes, including increased risks of flooding, storms, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, and sea level rise increase the probability of disasters contributing to internal and international forced migration. The physical and social processes recently triggered by Hurricane Katrina underscore that emerging reality. The catastrophic losses from Hurricane Katrina demonstrate in horrific fashion the urgent need to develop the conceptual, strategic, and material tools to confront the increasing challenges of natural hazards made even more potent and complex by climate change, increasing population densities, and environmental degradation in the twenty-first century.