Being Guatemalan: Transformative Research on Positionality and the Nonprofit Sector

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Conflict of Interest: The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

Abstract

Increased global migration supported by the ease of communication gives individuals from the global south the opportunity to utilize the resources of the global north to support nonprofit organizations serving the communities of their home countries. Contributing to a gap in sector conversations, this transformative exploratory qualitative cross-case study looks at two indigenous/native Guatemalan nonprofit leaders presently positioned in North America whose organizations, one registered in Guatemala and one registered in the U.S., serve and help communities in Guatemala. The inquiry looks at how the leaders' Guatemalan positionality as inside experts positioned on the outside, and as informed by intersecting identities and a lived experiences in Guatemala and North America, guides each leaders' organizational theory of action. Findings suggest indigenous grassroots voices within a cross-border context are a critical component of nonprofit knowledge production and action.

Key Words: adaptive ecology, Guatemala, intersectionality, nonprofit, positionality, theory of action

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Statement of Problem

The purpose of this transformative exploratory cross-case study is to understand how an indigenous or native nonprofit leader's positionality informs the decisions and actions taken on behalf of their nonprofit organization. This study asked: *Given a frame of Guatemalan nonprofit leaders presently positioned in North America temporarily or permanently, how does a Guatemalan's positionality influence his theory of action when leading his organization?* Increased global travel, a result of globalization, gives individuals from the developing, generally poorer, global south the greater opportunity to utilize the resources of the more developed and richer global north to support the nonprofit organizations serving their indigenous/native home communities. Immigrant and migrant communities positioned in the global north may form the organizations, or organization representatives may travel to the global north to acquire education or form alliances. This phenomenon is likely one feature of what Anheier and Themudo (2005) called "the internationalization of the nonprofit sector," whereby the nonprofit sector continually becomes more international in scope. These internationalized changes open new avenues of inquiry towards a fuller understanding of the operationalization of the nonprofit sector (Anheier & Salamon, 2006). Yet, as the influence of globalization melds the local and international nonprofit sectors, current academic conversation voices concern over the plethora of parallel research produced between the local and international sectors (Lewis, 2014) while, at the same time, lamenting the loss of local sector distinctions within international research parameters (Marshall & Suárez, 2014). I suggest there is a group of under-researched indigenous or native nonprofit leaders who straddle the local and international sectors as part of their nonprofit mission. Given the globalized ease of travel and communication between the local and the

international, this local/international nonprofit inquiry seeks to bring forward the expertise of immigrant, migrant, student, etc., nonprofit leaders located in the global north, permanently or temporarily, whose organizations benefit their home communities.

This paper argues the voice of the indigenous or native nonprofit leader has not been part of the internationalized conversation even while they are making an impact on the nonprofit sector. More specifically, research has failed to ask what can be learned when individuals of the global south travel to the global north subsequently undertaking or seeking support(s) for nonprofit efforts benefitting their home communities? Rather than the more typical scenario of researcher(s) of the global north traveling to the global south to extract information or report on a project, what understanding can be gleaned about the nonprofit sector when the researcher seeks knowledge from within his/her North American communities of bi-national, migrant, or immigrant educators, researchers, volunteers, leaders, etc., who undertake nonprofit work? How do these bi-nationals, migrants, or immigrants use their position in, and access to, the global north to inform the decisions they make for their nonprofits whose mission aids their home communities in the global south? These questions disrupt the typical positionality of current nonprofit research. That is, the questions reevaluate the typical way and the typical lens through which knowledge is interpreted and constructed opening the opportunity to interrogate what is known about the nonprofit sector.

This article engages the above questions by investigating the influence of positionality on an indigenous/native-led nonprofits' theory of action when the nonprofit leader, though not necessarily the organization, is located in North America. This qualitative research is the result of interviews granted by two indigenous/native-Guatemalan nonprofit leaders. One leader, whose association is registered and operates in Guatemala, holds a visa to Vancouver, British Columbia,

while attending a certificate program at a First Nations university. The second leader is a long-time U.S. immigrant from Guatemala whose southern California 501(c)(3) organization supports rural schools in Guatemala. Guatemala's colonial history, civil war, and post-conflict reality has produced valuable nonprofit research investigations; unfortunately, none investigate how Guatemalans positioned in North America understand the Guatemalan situation as it guides the actions they take on behalf of their organizations. Included in the study of the leaders' positionality is also the investigation of the leaders' various but simultaneously held identities (e.g., leader, student, immigrant, etc.) and the leaders' lived experiences. Bringing the concepts together, the case study sought to answer how positionality, as informed by intersecting identities and lived experiences in Guatemala and North America, guides the actions each leader takes on behalf of his organization. I claim opening this discussion expands nonprofit literature not by only opening discussion within a knowledge void, but also creating more empowering and equal conversations in the knowledge produced.

The Guatemalan Context

Guatemala's history is one of continuous, brutal discrimination against the indigenous population. The Guatemalan government's Spanish colonialists established a feudalistic society, which subjugated and exploited the country's indigenous Mayan population in order to support market agriculture (Grandin, 2000; Loucky & Moors, 2000). This system continued beyond independence in the 19th century and into industrialization in the 20th century without major disruption (Louckey & Moors, 2000). The Cold War's threat of communism spurred Washington, D.C., interest in Guatemala when the democratically elected governments of Arévalo (1945-1950) and Arbens (1951-1954) initiated democratic reforms including land redistribution. United Fruit Company, a U.S.-based corporation with considerable property

holdings in Guatemala, reacted to redistribution by convincing the U.S. government the reforms were communist based (Blum, 2001; Louckey & Moors, 2000; Schelesinger & Kinser, 1982). A U.S.-backed CIA-sponsored coup overthrew the Arbens government in 1954, leading the way for a succession of repressive military regimes that unleashed a civil war beginning in 1960 between the military regimes and opposing internal forces (Blum, 2001; Louckey & Moors, 2000). In the 1980s spurred by Castro's success in Cuba, guerrilla opposition emerged resulting in retaliatory genocidal "scorched earth" policies of the military government (Blum, 2001; Grandin, 2000) mainly targeting the mountainous departments (i.e., states) of Huehuetenango and El Quiché where many indigenous Maya had villages. The civil war lasted until 1996 resulting in "200,000 deaths, 1 million homeless and internally displaced persons, thousands of refugees, and the annihilation of over 440 indigenous villages in a country with a population of 11 million" (Blum, 2001, p. 329; See also *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (Guatemala), & Higonnet, 2009; *Proyecto Interdiocesano Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (Guatemala), Catholic Institute for International Relations, & Latin America Bureau, 1999).

Peace expanded the influence and role of the Guatemalan nonprofit sector, particularly in the role of post-conflict redevelopment (Beck, 2014; Blum, 2001). It is estimated there were between 1,000 and 1,500 nonprofit organizations when the peace accords were signed (Beck, 2014; Browning, 1993; Sridhar, 2007). Some estimates state there are now as many as 10,000 organizations operating in the country (Beck, 2011; Browning, 1993; Sridhar, 2007). It is unknown how many of these organizations are indigenous-led. It is equally unknown how many indigenous-led nonprofits exist outside Guatemala whose purpose is to support Guatemalan communities.

The civil war and post-conflict violence and economic hardship are largely responsible for the contemporary Maya diaspora (Loucky & Moors, 2000). By the mid-1980s, the worst years of the civil war, there were large numbers of Maya in California, Florida, and Texas (Loucky & Moors, 2000). Since, the persistently deteriorating economic conditions continue to send migrants north (Stoll, 2013). Guatemalan communities have a particularly large presence in the Los Angeles area occupying the poorest of the city's barrios (Levenson-Estrada, 2013; Loucky & Moors, 2000). Secondary migrations have now situated Maya across United States Sunbelt and in Canada from British Columbia to Prince Edward Island (Loucky & Moors, 2000).

This paper looks at two Guatemalan nonprofit leaders who are presently positioned in North America. Ignacio Ochoa is the legal representative for Fundacion Nahual, a registered Guatemalan membership association, who on a Canadian visa while attending a First Nations university. Edwin Villela, the President of Help for Schools, Inc., is a Guatemalan immigrant to the U.S. living with his family in Oceanside, California. An investigation into the lived experiences of these two leaders allows us to explore how positionality informs these leader's organizational actions.

Theoretical Framework Informing Inquiry

The specific theoretical framework for this article posits an individual whose identity is closely connected to the global south, but who is located in the global north for some reason, uniquely understands the situation of their home country based on lived experiences, both personal and systemic, thereby guiding the actions they take on behalf of their nonprofit organization. Several concepts inform this frame: adaptive ecology, positionality, and intersectionality. These concepts can be brought together under a general theory of action, that is, the concepts inform the way in which the leader understands the situation that guides the action

they take on behalf of the organization. Whereas other theoretical frames most certainly have

potentially equal potency, this frame effectively allows an underlying argument for greater

transformative inquiry in nonprofit scholarship. That is, the frames of adaptive ecology,

positionality and intersectionality, disrupts the way knowledge about the nonprofit sector is

collected, created, and, thus, understood (Banks, 2007). The following explains the proposed

framework by taking a transformative perspective for each concept of adaptive ecology,

positionality and intersectionality as impacted by lived experience, then using a general theory of

action to explain how these concepts inform a leader's organizational action.

Adaptive Ecology and Positionality

The Guatemalan nonprofit sector is a complex adaptive ecological system (McDonald,

Mitchell, Elliott, 2015). It is a nested system of individual, micro, meso, exo, macro interactions

among various agents and actors in which time (the chrono interaction) plays a significant role

(Brofenbrenner, 1979: Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). The system is interdependent; meaning action

within one component of the system shifts and adjusts the subsequent actions of the other

components (Brofenbrenner, 1979). The system, then, is not concrete and resists concreteness;

rather, the system is one of lasting change, or adaptation, as a condition of development

(McDonald, Mitchell, Elliott, 2015). Given the ecological system, it can be reasoned the

systemic position from which the individual makes meaning, or experiences realities, and thus,

develops, is impacted by the individual's interactions with the various nested components. This

systemic social positioning is known as positionality (Alcoff, 1988; Banks, 2007; Takacs, 2003),

which establishes who the individual is, how the individual experiences reality, and how the

individual understands differences. Furthermore, because the system is one of change, one's

positionality is also changing and developing (Alcoff, 1988). Mirroring Banks (2007).

Subsequently, I argue acknowledging these systemic positional changes and developments have the potential to transform nonprofit research.

The increased interaction and integration between the global south and the global north as a consequence of globalization allows nonprofit researchers to transform the ways in which the researcher forecloses the epistemology of nonprofit scholarship. Especially given better technology supports and easier communication, researcher and the researched have a greater opportunity to produce an interactive understanding— an understanding not barring the indigenous informant from knowledge production (Banks, 2007; Spivak, 1988, 1999). Increased interaction and integration opens a critique of nonprofit research frameworks to uncover processes that inadvertently and unconsciously reproduce ideology (a) ranking produced knowledge, (b) disenfranchising individuals in knowledge claims, and (c) assigning deficiency (Banks, 2007; Spivak, 1988; Takacs, 2003). Conversely, a research frame challenging where and by whom knowledge is collected uncovers assumptions and universalisms in epistemology. Disrupting inquiry positionality has a transformative effect (Banks, 2007). Disrupting inquiry positionality expands understanding of the interrelation of position, identity, and experience as it informs one's nonprofit practice.

Intersectionality and History

Given the transformative frame proposed above, it is obvious positionality connects to, and cannot be separated from, one's gender, race, ethnicity, etc., which form various identities within the individual (Alcoff, 1988; Banks, 2007; McCall, 2005). The multiple and simultaneous identities one holds, known as intersectionality, informs one's positional perspective. That is, one's identities not only inform how one perceives others, but also, inform one's expectations of how others will perceive him/her (McCall, 2005). Alzuldúa (1987) then

takes intersectionality one step further by suggesting there is a specific identity for those

positioned in a constant state of transition between borders, that is, a borderland location

occurring in the space where two or more cultures, classes, individuals, etc., edge each other,

whereby the individual is both us and them, or insider and outsider, at the same time. Obviously,

these perspectives are constructed in part by one's lived experiences (Alcoff, 1988). These lived

experiences are not only experiences unique to the individual. Lived experiences also include

significant national events profoundly impacting the ecological components with which the

individual interacts to the extent that the events shape, or have bound the bodies of, the

individual, such a colonialism and war (Bourdieu, 1977; Levenson-Estrata, 2013; Spivak, 1999).

To bring the concepts of positionality and intersectionality together within the adaptive ecology

understanding, Figure 1 explains intersectionality is the intersection of one's multitude of

simultaneous identities set within a historical context, both personal and systemic, thereby

framing one's positional meaning making to inform his/her nonprofit practice. The theoretical

framework then concludes that the interplay of these concepts influences how the individual

understands a situation thereby guiding the actions the individual takes.

[Figure 1 Here]

Theory of Action

Theory of action is the general theory undergirding the various positional interactions.

Theory of action seeks to explain the actions an individual takes. It assumes actions are based on

the individual's embedded position in a socialized system, which places boundaries on the

options of action the individual considers (Alcoff, 1988; Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). The actions an

individual takes are conditioned actions based on his/her social relationships. These conditioned

actions are developed as groups of individuals have the same experiences of existence. This is

not to say the impetus for conditioned action is definitively known or specifically reasoned. In most instances the reason for action cannot be rationalized other than stating, "that's the way we do things around here" (Bourdieu, 1998; Parsons & Shils, 1951). As Bourdieu (1998) clarifies, the position one occupies produces habits regulating the actions one takes. These regulating habits are, more often than not, inadvertent and unconscious actions, yet structure understanding of the situation(s) prompting the action.

Theory of action then, as a general theory, effectively undergirds the ecological, positional, and intersectional concepts guiding a nonprofit leader's actions. An individual, in this case the indigenous/native Guatemalan nonprofit leader, values the position s/he holds within the system (i.e., micro, meso, exo, macro interactions); therefore, the leaders' actions mirror the values of the position held (Bourdieu, 1998; Parsons & Shils, 1951). This means actions taken on behalf of the nonprofit are tied to structural and cultural factors, including the intersecting factors of race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc., across contexts such as borders, cultures, and classes (Hands & Hubbard, 2011; Parsons & Shils, 1951). Actions taken also reflect time; that is, the leader acts in a way that is appropriate in the present (Bourdieu, 1977). These actions have historical conditioning as stories, narratives, myths, emblems, oaths, etc., institutionalize the learning of habits that are then operationalized within the ecological system (e.g., individual motivation, nonprofit mission, voluntary action, government processes, etc.) (Alcoff, 1988; Bourdieu, 1977; Parsons & Shils, 1951). It is important to note that any lines implied within the stated theory are blurry. Bourdieu (1998) cautions lines are only theoretical realities, and this extends to the concepts of adaptive ecology, positionality, and intersectionality as bounded by lived experience. In essence, the interaction between these concepts is messy. However, the messiness of reality supports the argument for transformative inquiry. Acknowledging the

messiness transforms current nonprofit research by revealing opportunities to expand our understanding of the nonprofit sector.

Methodology

Case Study

This cross-case study explores the proposition that positionality, as an adaptive process interacting with the environment, and as related to intersecting identities and lived experiences, including experiences carried deeply in cultural history, informs one's organizational actions. The research question asks, given a frame of Guatemalan nonprofit leaders presently positioned in North America temporarily or permanently, how does a Guatemalan's positionality influence his theory of action when leading his organization? The "how" and "why" nature of the question makes it appropriate for a case study research design. More specific to a direct case study definition, the question indicates a contemporary event with the presence of operational links, which manifest over time, over which a researcher has no control (Yin, 2003, 2009). The author proposes it is a general theory of action acting as the operational link between the adaptive ecology, within which operations occur, and the concepts of positionality, intersectionality, and history. As such, the aim is not to make generalizations among a set population or establish causation, but rather, make generalizable a theoretical proposition (Yin, 2003, 2009).

The sampling frame for this inquiry sought out indigenous Guatemalan nonprofit leaders who are currently positioned in North America. Convenience sampling was used to secure study participants. The author has an established research interest in the Guatemalan nonprofit sector holding a number of in-country Guatemalan contacts and non-Guatemalan nonprofit sector experts; however, the author found it difficult to establish contact with Guatemalan-led organizations outside Guatemala. Through professional relationships, two leaders were

approached and their participation secured. This inquiry proceeded under the appropriate Human

Subjects Review processes.

Data was obtained from interviews with supporting organizational documentation

consisting of organizational websites, photographs, and previous reports. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted, one in person and one via a videoconference interface. Prior to each

interview, the author visited with each participant for approximately three hours to explain the

purpose of the inquiry and establish a comfortable working relationship. These interactions were

not recorded, but research memos were written following the visits from which the thematic

concept of positionality informing the leaders' theory of action emerged. Each semi-structured

interview was open-ended allowing the leader to set the pace and duration, and construct the

meanings for the theoretical framework under investigation (Saldaña & Miles, 2013). The

interviews were recorded lasting from one to two hours. The author transcribed and coded the

interviews. The leaders volunteered supporting documentation and were allowed to give input to

the final reporting. The author acquired permission to use the leaders' first names and the names

of their organizations for this study.

Data was analyzed using theoretical analytic strategy through the tactic of pattern

matching prescribed by Yin (2003, 2009). The interviews were coded thematically to adequately

capture a unified meaning to the patterned experience (Saldaña & Miles, 2013). The primary

coding category was theory of action supported by the coding subcategories of adaptive ecology,

positionality, intersectionality, and history. To answer the research question, coding did not need

to produce concise, parallel terminology between interviewees, but only reveal how positionality,

intersectionality, and history inform the leader's theory of organizational action. By studying

data content related to the stated concepts, patterns of action emerged mirroring the theoretical

framework under investigation (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Because the concepts under study

overlap in operation, interviews underwent four separate rounds of coding, one round per

concept.

Supporting documentation was used to support this coding and provide clarity. A cross-

case comparison of action patterns was then initiated to contextualize narratives and control for

inferences.

Definitions

Nonprofit is broadly defined as "organizations that are organized, private, self-governing,

non-profit distributing, and voluntary" (Anaheier & Salamon, 2006, p.103). This inquiry does

not distinguish non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international non-governmental

organizations (INGOs), or international philanthropy as unique to the definition. Leader is

defined as one holding a position of influence within the nonprofit organization, who is goal

directed and action oriented, and assumes some form of hierarchy within the group (Nahavandi,

2012).

[Table 1 Here]

Participant Cases

Fundación Nahual

"My base is in Guatemala…I always thought that whatever I do to train, to get training,

to study is to go back and serve. Nothing really gets better than being in Guatemala. Nothing."

Ochoa's history is compelling. Born and raised in Guatemala, he trained as a Jesuit in his

younger years, attending the Jesuit chain of universities in Guatemala, El Salvador, and

Nicaragua. He spent some months and years living in every country in Central America, and

completed research in Ecuador, Colombia, and Mexico. Traveling and meeting people, he

became aware of, and interested in, the growing grassroots political movements, citizen and guerrilla, organizing against the repressive Central American governments of the time. Interestingly, he admits at one point he picked coffee for the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. He left the Jesuits in 1990, after his professors and companion Jesuits were killed in El Salvador on November 19, 1989. Back in Guatemala, Ochoa worked for the Jesuit Refugee Service and was one of six Guatemalans who co-found the Archbishops Office of Human Rights in Guatemala (ODHAG). He later founded and ran a Guatemalan Cultural Center and a Mayan and Spanish Language School in the rural mountains of Guatemala. He worked in support of during the El Salvador and Guatemalan refugee repatriation turn process from 1987 onward, and also worked to create more open dialogue to build community and teach Guatemalans, especially rural Guatemalans about the political ramification and rights of the 1996 Guatemalan peace negotiations. Since that time, he has remained focused on community organizing. Commenting on his extremely interesting past, of only a few words are written here, he states, "I never asked to be in these circumstances. I never created anything. I was only following the path presented me."

Ochoa is the legal representative and a member of the assembly of Fundación Nahual located in Antigua, Guatemala, in the department (i.e., state) of Sacatepéquez. Founded in 2002, Fundación Nahual is a registered association in Guatemala as a voluntary, uncompensated, indigenous planning group focused on citizen participatory education. Relying on word of mouth to identify service locations, the association conducts schools of leadership and training with communities of indigenous peoples to form Community Development Councils (COCODEs), a public investment and planning system established by the Guatemalan government. The COCODE is the legal means by which communities can bring forward priorities for municipal

improvements and secure money from the Guatemalan government to fund those improvements.

It is not that indigenous communities are not organized. Ochoa firmly stated, "I never, never

found disorganized communities. I always found organized communities. The thing is that

they're organized not in [a colonial[1]] understanding." That is, they have always organized

themselves for centuries according to traditional collectives that share work and resources

amongst families and villages. Fundación Nahual's work is a collaborative partnership with

established community leaders encompassing an empowerment and transformative pedagogy

employing a range of teaching tools. Teaching tools developed have included a radio program, or

radio *novela,* to engage audiences in learning through a popular entertainment medium to

textbooks authored in partnership with community leadership. Once the COCODE is established

in the area serviced, Fundación Nahual works with the community to gain access to the

government-owned community house for meetings, educate communities on their rights and

duties as citizens of the post-conflict Guatemalan political system, and assist the COCODE's

entry into Guatemala's multi-level representative political structure.

    Education plays a central role to Ochoa's service to Fundación Nahual and the

Guatemalan people. Ochoa not only holds a Jesuit education through universities in Guatemala,

El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama receiving the equivalent of a bachelor and masters degrees,

he has also attended universities in Boston and San Diego. In 1997, he pursued a Fellowship

Program in Medical Anthropology and Public Health Studies at Boston University, and in 1999

he received a masters degree in Latin American Studies and Anthropology from San Diego State

University. He teaches university classes in Guatemala and has taught a geography course for

one British Columbia university. He also coordinates and facilitates a study abroad program for

Guatemalan and Canadian universities. In order to learn from what he indicates are the "real

people" located where he travels, he volunteers and works in construction and other menial jobs.

He plans to pursue a doctorate in the future. Ochoa lives in Guatemala, working to strengthen

civil society by teaching methods of community organizing to local communities. He says that

educational exchanges have been beneficial to him and seeks ways for education to benefit the

work of Fundación Nahual and indigenous communities.

Ochoa is presently attending a First Nations university in Vancouver, British Columbia,

working toward a counseling certificate in First Nations Studies. The training will help

Fundación Nahual address the common alcoholism and domestic abuse problems in indigenous

communities with pedagogy respectful of the indigenous people and their ways of learning.

Fundación Nahual sees this pedagogy as a mechanism for increased community organizing and

local sustainability. The fundación wishes to eventually start its own indigenous university.

Ochoa explains the purpose of such at university would be to meet people where they are,

acknowledging not only level of abuse but also high levels of illiteracy, with the hope that a

comfortable pedagogy can spur individuals to pursue university courses. Ochoa explains, "It's so

different when you teach sociology, or anthropology, or political science in a format where, yes,

you understand the world, the outside world" whereas an indigenous pedagogy assures

indigenous communities "there is something within their own culture, it will be something that

we order their knowledge, that they will be more prepared, no? Not just for their own people, but

for all of us." In other words, he sees using an indigenous pedagogy as utilizing the strength of

the community experiences that are part of their culture and history. Fundación Nahual plans to

sustain the university by coordinating student exchange programs particularly recruiting

indigenous students in North America for cross-cultural participation.

Ochoa is committed to the service of his country. He remains in constant contact with the fundación in Guatemala through televideo interfaces and email in order to see to necessary business, and will return to Guatemala upon completion of his certificate program. He believes in accountability for everyone, including himself, and this belief manifests in different ways. He remains suspect and critical of the Guatemalan government, which continues to struggle with corruption, the Guatemalan university, which is structured to keep the elite fractured from the rest of Guatemala, and the international and local nongovernmental organizations, which he feels are exclusionary of the communities they seek to help. Ochoa believes each Guatemalan has a place of service and each needs to find that place. He feels it is Guatemalan's, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Mayan or elite, who have a collective responsibility to make their country better.

Fundación Para La Educación En Guatemala (Help for Schools, Inc.)

"Well, I come to the states, you know, and then years later when I went back to Guatemala, I made a trip – my first trip was in, if I recall, in 1988. So, you're looking at eight years later by the time I had gone through the country. Close to twelve years later, I am going back…. I see the places and I thought, I mean, we're progressing in Guatemala but I see more people, and I see more poverty, too. We're developing but with development also comes other problems."

Villela's story is no less compelling. Villela was born and raised in Guatemala, with two brothers and two sisters. They lost their father in the civil war. Villela explains,

> I don't recall exactly how they took place, but I know that the guerrilla warfare
> and all that started in the late 1960s. I'm sorry, no, in the mid-60s the movement,
> the guerrilla movement, started. And so, there were confrontations, especially in

the eastern part of the country. Back then we knew that there were influences

from communist countries trying to aid this movements…so, there were certain

confrontations…and, my father, I don't recall exactly how it happened, but I

know that he was part of the groups that were formed in towns to protect

themselves. I don't exactly know how the confrontation was. In one of those

confrontations, my dad lost his life….

Villela was 15 years old when his father was killed. In an effort to continue to support her

family, his mother immigrated to the United States. All of his brothers and sisters eventually

followed her.

In Guatemala, Villela attended various urban primary schools before entering the military

school to pursue a military career. He eventually left the military school because, he states, "I

had disciplinary problems." He then obtained a bachelors diploma in science and language.

Villela worked in the banking sector in Guatemala City. He finally left Guatemala in 1980, when

the war escalated, to join his family in Los Angeles. Villela initially supported himself through

shift work at a factory. He laughs as he says, "And, of course to me it was like a shock, you

know? Getting used to see how we were making furniture down there with nails and hammers

and coming here and seeing these big machines that would put together chairs and tables so fast

and everything on an assembly line." To improve his position, he first attended ESL classes then

pursued courses in real estate through a local college obtaining his real estate license in 1984. By

this time, Villela had a wife and family. Villela, tired of the densely populated Los Angeles area,

eventually moved his family to Oceanside, (at that time) a sparsely populated northern suburb of

San Diego, where is currently resides.

Villela is president of Help for Schools, Inc., a registered 501(c)(3) organization located in Oceanside, California. A group of friends, all Guatemalan immigrants in either San Diego or Los Angeles, informally started the organization in 2008 to assist their Guatemalan home communities suffering a severe drought. Providing items like medicine and food, their efforts continued for nearly two years. In order to increase the reach of their aid, the group registered as a formal nonprofit in 2010. The organization is voluntary and its officers are uncompensated. Villela states one hundred percent of money raised goes to projects. Their organization relies on newspaper articles, word of mouth, and referrals from members, family, and friends to identify service locations, and works closely with volunteers in Guatemala. Help for Schools is not registered in Guatemala, though Villela feels it will eventually pursue that registration since it would improve the organization's work. At present, he states the organization is working well.

Education plays a central role to the work of Help for Schools. The group decided the most indelible mission for the organization was to support education. Villela states education helps Guatemalans improve themselves so they can improve their country. Help for Schools targets rural schools where students from other villages walk hours through trails between hills and mountains to attend. Villela states it would be just as easy to help schools in the more populated areas, and the government does provide help to even the most rural of schools. However, because of their target schools' location supplies often do not arrive until well into the school year. Help for Schools gives the rural children a good start to the school year. Villela explains, "Once [the parents] know that an organization with supplies and they will have means to learn, to learn better, maybe even learn a little more, we have seen that these kids, instead of being turned out to the fields to work, you know, they're sent to school." Help for Schools sponsors at least 500 kids annually.

Supplies are delivered once a year. The organization generally provides items like backpacks, notebooks, pencils, crayons, as well as teaching aids for the teachers. However, the organization has also provided needed infrastructure where it is lacking. Villela states, "We always say a school, a school, a school; but, in some of these places, teachers teach under the shade of a tree, with the kids sitting on the ground, you know?" The organization has raised funds to build school buildings, kitchens to ensure the children are provided a nice meal, and sanitary facilities so children do not have to use outhouses. In certain circumstances, they have also provided electricity and water to school buildings. Villela reports Help for Schools has seen enrollment increase by almost 50 percent where their organization has provided help.

Help for Schools works closely with the villages they serve. In terms of building projects, Help for Schools commits to providing the building materials while the communities provide the labor. The organization obtains costs for materials then, with the help of in-country volunteers, approaches the leadership committee in the village with a proposal. Villela states, "We want [the community] to be part of it…." Since roads only go so far, a truck drops the supplies then every capable individual – children, parents, and grandparents – carry all the materials up the hills. Besides school supplies, materials include cement blocks, rebar, sand, chairs, and desks. Villela concludes, "They do it with such enthusiasm because they feel happy that [someone] has an interest in their little community." The organization has visited each of the served locations at least once. Every time an organizational member travels to Guatemala, usually for personal reasons, they meet with those involved with the projects and with volunteers.

Villela is committed to the development of Guatemala. Relying on volunteers, word of mouth from family and friends of organizational members, and newspaper articles, speaking the language and having a common connection to the country enable the organization's success.

Villela states, "Outside help only goes so far; that's just a fact." Villela sees other nonprofit

organizations working in the villages and notes they have contributed much to the communities'

improvement. However, Villela believes it is Guatemalans who need to do the work to improve

their country. He states,

> *We*, as Guatemalans, need to get better. You know, we want to see our country
>
> better, we want society better. We got to get better educated, and we have to
>
> respect our resources or develop in a better way. But, if we Guatemalans don't
>
> learn to upgrade ourselves, the country's not going to do it. It's just not going to
>
> happen. I do believe that we can get better. But, I know it's *our* people, it's
>
> Guatemalans, who will do it, you know? Yes, the outside help could help, but I
>
> don't put my hopes on that outside aid, you know? I would like to see it within
>
> ourselves. Through us. [emphasis his]

Villela clearly identifies himself as Guatemalan with a responsibility to his country. He is

committed to the mission of Help for Kids and would like to find more U.S. sponsors,

emphasizing he will go anywhere and speak to anyone interested in helping to further their

mission. Villela stated he is ready to pass on the leadership of the organization to another

member.

His mom and one brother eventually returned to Guatemala. Villela and his wife own

property and a home near his Guatemalan home village. They plan to retire there.

Findings

Ochoa and Villela are Guatemalans, currently positioned outside their home country, who

hold leadership positions in the nonprofit sector. Ochoa is currently attending classes at an

indigenous university in Canada in order to enhance the educational mission of his Guatemalan

association with an indigenous pedagogy. Villela is a citizen of the United States, located in

Oceanside, California, who has partnered with other Guatemalan immigrants to form a nonprofit

to support rural schools in Guatemala. Both leaders remain firmly connected to their home

country. Ochoa will return to Guatemala once his course work is completed. Villela has a home

in Guatemala where he and his wife plan to retire. This firm connection to Guatemala is the

impetus for the work they undertake.

Being Guatemalan – An Understanding of Positionality in Organizational Action

Ochoa and Villela are first, and foremost, Guatemalan. Both leaders hold pride and love

of their country along with a strong sense of responsibility to serve and help. They believe their

country can be successful. Given this context, being Guatemalan appears to be more than an

identity. Rather, it appears to be an adequate identifier for the positionality that informs these

leaders organizational actions. Informed by each leader's lived experiences within the

Guatemalan culture, which includes exposure to the civil war, the leaders hold a broad range of

identities, all of which relate to how each leader experiences and responds to Guatemala's

realities through their organizations. Their Guatemalan positionality exposes who they are, how

they experience the realities of their country, and how differences may account for their views

guiding their organizational actions. The Guatemalan positionality remains constant throughout

the varied contexts within which the leader operates.

As Guatemalans, Ochoa and Villela share a number of positional similarities. This is not

to say similarities are the key findings of this report. Neither can or should these similarities be

taken as generalizable to a larger population. Each leader's experiences have framed their

Guatemalan positionality in unique ways. Yet, the number of similarities is interesting. These

similarities contextualize the leaders' narratives from which being Guatemalan, as a

positionality, can be examined for its impact on the leader's organizational action.

[Figure 2 Here]

Both are older males born and raised in Guatemala, educated, regularly experience in-

border and cross-border travel, and were impacted by the civil war. Because of their experiences,

both leaders readily seek out information allowing them to help their home country. This is not

to say differences do not exist. Possibly the most interesting divergence in terms of historical

significance was that while Ochoa was influenced positively by the people's movements of the

war, Villela knew the movements as a negative and dangerous influence. This divergence,

coincidently, represents the two most prominent positions of the war. Yet, both leaders hold a

strong affinity towards education as a transformative organizational mission. They subsequently

utilize the transborder access, opportunities, and resources in North American to fulfill this

mission.

Being Guatemalan makes these leaders insiders and outsiders simultaneously. These men

occupy the borderlands – the space between their present location and Guatemala (present and

past) – never wholly comfortable outside the borders of their home, but still effectively

traversing borders to operate in North America. To explain, Ochoa and Villela occupy positions

outside Guatemala; though, within the North American communities they inhabit (however

temporarily or permanently), they are considered of another place. This is not necessarily

negative since even while located outside Guatemala they feel close to the realities of their home

country. Guatemala's struggles are part of them and the feel compelled to serve and help their

country. Yet, this experience reverses itself in Guatemala. In Guatemala, Ochoa and Villela are

outsiders who occupy other spaces (i.e., education, professional status, legal residency, etc.)

beyond the indigenous communities they serve and help. The borderland is a negotiated space, which Ochoa and Villela use effectively to meet their organizational missions.

The work Ochoa and Villela accomplish through their organizations also reflects their lived experience tied to Guatemala's history. The colonial system and war has lasting effects on Guatemala particularly effecting indigenous people who have been subjugated throughout. Examples of this colonial and war legacy include deficits in indigenous political representation and expedient educational support, as well as sweeping alcohol and domestic abuse. The leaders have knowledge of these situations as a result of being Guatemalan and/or from personal experience. As such, the leaders undertake organizational missions addressing the situations based on supports they have found personally successful or meaningful. This is not to argue the leaders necessarily openly claim a case or organize a social movement for equality. Rather, both leaders undertake organizational programming giving citizens with less power, typically indigenous individuals, equal voice. Examples include recognizing and respecting community leadership structures, making certain the communities are fully involved in the organization's work, following the laws to legitimate the existence of their organizations, and attending to structures having the potential to delegitimize individuals (e.g., the Guatemalan government and the Guatemalan education system) through organizational mission and programming.

[Table 2 Here]

[Table 3 Here]

Finally, Ochoa and Villela are adamant Guatemalans must seek the answers to develop their country. As such, the leaders believe the work required of development is their own responsibility, establishing nonprofit sector organizations contributing to that work. Ochoa and Villela effectively use their North American access to seek out collaborations, funding,

pedagogy, and other resources, including the supports of Guatemalan immigrant communities, to support their organizational missions. Their actions are not an adamant rejection of outside contributions. In fact, Villela sees NGOs as contributing positively to Guatemalan communities. Rather, it is Ochoa's criticism of the way outside NGOs operate separate from the communities they seek to help that spurs caution. North American and other outside resources can contribute to Guatemala; however, these outside entities' means of engagement should perhaps be more collaborative and empowering. The leaders' believe Guatemalans must be the individuals to do the work of development.

Discussion

This transformative inquiry case study looked at two Guatemalan nonprofit sector leaders positioned in North America. The purpose of the study was to begin to look at differences between the local and the international in nonprofit sector work. Specifically, this case study presents how indigenous-led Guatemalan organizations, whose leaders are positioned in North America either temporarily or permanently, utilize North American resources to accomplish their organizational missions. The study's purpose was to transform the typical international nonprofit research scenario by turning attention to the rich resources of nonprofit information within Northern-positioned migrant and immigrant communities. While this cross-case inquiry does not engage correlations with the international context, it does form a theoretical framework from which engagement can be pursued.

The theoretical framework posited that the globalized nonprofit sector is a complex adaptive ecological system of individual, micro, meso, exo, macro interactions among various agents and actors impacted by time (chrono) framing a leader's positionality such that it informs the actions leaders take on behalf of their organization. In terms of this case study, the

theoretical framework proposes a Guatemalan nonprofit leader's positionality within this adaptive system informs their theory of action on behalf of their organization. The study identified leaders' positionality as related to the intersections of (1) their multiple, simultaneously-held identities, (2) lived experiences, and (3) cross-border contexts. These intersections included the significant Guatemalan events of colonialism and civil war as well as personal experiences of migration and education. The case study findings supported the study's theoretical claim discovering the two leaders were first and foremost Guatemalan, which was not merely an identity but, rather, an adequate identifier of their positionality. The leaders traverse various borders effectively to secure access to resources to help their home communities. It is this Guatemalan positionality that directly informs each leader's nonprofit work.

Furthermore, the study supports research seeking to learn how migrant and immigrant communities organize through nonprofit organizations to serve and help their home countries enhancing our knowledge of the nonprofit sector. This study only begins a conversation. The findings are not generalizable to a broader population and further research is assuredly necessary. Pragmatically, it needs to be determined the prevalence of indigenous-led nonprofits in North America to better fully assess their impact. Theoretically, the study opened questions related to how the nonprofit sector currently approaches sustainability in relation to access to resources within our current operating models (including effectively utilizing the resource of distance), what are the implications for mitigating resource constraints including costs of in-country research and project development, what are the implications for understanding the integrity of connection to community in research and project development and what are the implications to organizational accountability.

Finally, this cross-case study increased interaction and integration with indigenous nonprofit informants to broaden nonprofit sector inquiry. Located in North America, these leaders are the indigenous-insiders (Banks, 2007) positioned on the outside. The inquiry transforms the typical international research position from which knowledge about the nonprofit sector is produced by seeking information from within the global north rather than extracting it from the global south. Furthermore, the leader's narratives disrupted the reproduction of a typical research scenario by prioritizing the indigenous leaders' knowledge, empowering the indigenous leaders' voice in knowledge production, and strengthening the indigenous leaders' knowledge claims. These leaders are the expert informants North American researchers should seek out in our own communities.

Notes

1. Ochoa used the word colonial to indicate the organizational system formed by the Spanish who colonized Guatemala, a system still largely in effect today. He also used the term to indicate Western-European community organizational systems as different to, and separate from, indigenous systems of community organizing.

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Figure 1

Figure 1. Theoretical framework relationship between positionality, intersectionality, and history within an adaptive ecological context.
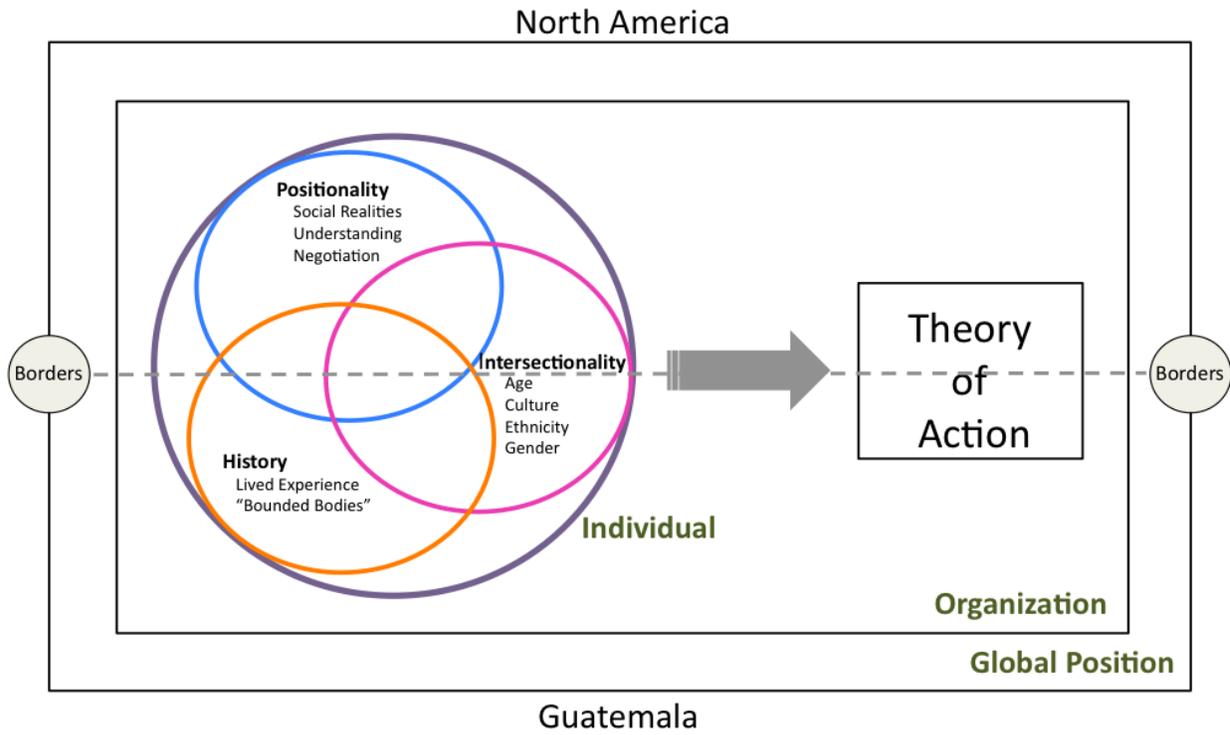
Figure 2

Figure 2. Revealed similarities and notable differences between leaders through narrative analysis.

Similarities and Notable Differences Between Interviewees

Ignacio	Edwin
• Older Male	• Older Male
• **Jesuit training*** and higher education	• **Some military training*** and higher education
• **People's movement history***	• **Anti-communist history***
• Civil War-impacted trajectory	• Civil War-impacted trajectory
• Exploration part of early years	• Exploration part of early years
• Ability to readily seek out information – direct connection to Guatemala	• Ability to readily seek out information – direct connection to Guatemala
• Shows strong work ethic	• Shows strong work ethic
• Shows importance of education	• Shows importance of education
• Holds simultaneous positions (see also identities)	• Holds simultaneous positions (see also identities)
• Guatemala = Home	• Guatemala = Home
• Traverses environmental and professional borders	• Traverses environmental and professional borders
• Holds a leadership position within the organization	• Holds a leadership position within the organization
• **Critical of NGOs***	• **Favorable towards NGOs***
• No application for services; relies on word-of-mouth	• No application for services; relies on word-of-mouth
• Eventually will pursue legal nonprofit status in Guatemala	• Eventually will pursue legal nonprofit status in Guatemala
• Provides voluntary, uncompensated service	• Provides voluntary, uncompensated service
• States seeing profound "operational" change	• States seeing profound "operational" change
• Believes Guatemalans must do the changing; sustainable change is Guatemalan's responsibility	• Believes Guatemalans must do the changing; sustainable change is Guatemalan's responsibility

* Indicates notable difference

Table 1

Table 1. Category Definitions

Category	Definition
Primary Category	
Theory of action	Understanding guiding the actions taken on behalf of the organization
Sub-Categories	
Positionality	Social realities of the position of leader (*individual*)
Intersectionality	Simultaneously held identities, borderlands
History	Lived experience, historical incidents (*chrono)*
Ecosystem	Nested system of environmental components where action occurs (*micro*, *meso*, *exo*, *macro)*

Table 2

Table 2

Ignacio, Fundación Nahual

Organizational Action (Meso)	Corresponding Positionality (Micro, Meso, Exo, Macro)	Corresponding Intersectionality (Individual)	Lived Experience and Related History (Chrono)

Fundación
• Registered association
• COCODES development
 	
Empowerment Pedagogy
• Teaching fundación
• Fundación that helps, not to be helped
 	
Growth and Transition
• Register as nonprofit
• Create Indigenous University
  – counseling in alcohol and domestic violence
  – using an Indigenous pedagogy
• Establish Student Exchange Programs (to support fundación)
	Guatemala
	• One who feels Guatemala as his center
	• Strong sense of belonging
	• Feeling of having responsibility (both self and others)
	• One who values Guatemalan communities
	
	Insider/Outsider (Negotiated space)
	• Within Villages
	• Between countries
	  – Throughout Central America
	  – North America
	• Operating inside, but challenging, the law
	• As part of the community collective
	• Between languages
	• Between educated and uneducated, between teacher and student
	• Between privileged and under privileged (as in one who travels, knows the world)
	• Between labor and elite
	
	One with anti-colonial feelings
	• Critical of government
	• Challenges the status quo
	• Respects Indigenous ways
	• Positions himself outside the elite
	• Classified Indigenous
	• Identifies with people's movements
	
	One who serves
	• Seeks Alliances
	• Meets people where they are
	• Organizes
	• Critical of NGOs separating themselves from community
	
	One who educates
	• Informs community leaders of their position in the political system
	• Learns in order to educate others
	• Brings education to outsiders (exchange program)
	
	One who values accountability
	• Follows Guatemalan law for fundación
	• Peace accords (results of, process outcomes - rights, etc.)
	• Gaining recognition of community system by outside NGOs
	• Seeks education
	• Brings Indigenous into the whole (no longer outsiders)
	• Seeks equal voice
		Male (older)
		• Unmarried, not a father
		• Respectable man
		• Sibling/Son
		
		Guatemalan
		• Transnational (Traveler), borders
		• Central American
		• Inside Guatemala
		• Citizen
		• Indigenous
		• Native speaker, Spanish speaker
		
		Student
		• Jesuit
		• First Nations (Vancouver, B.C.)
		
		Teacher, developer, instructor, lecturer
		• COCODES
		• Geography (Vancouver, B.C.)
		• Guatemalan University
		• Exchange program
		
		Author/co-author
		
		Association leader (Legal Representative)
		
		Advocate
		
		Volunteer
		
		Community Organizer
		
		Member
		• COCODES
		• Fundacion
		• First Nations
		
		Community Collaborator
		
		Researcher
		
		Menial laborer
		• Construction worker
		• Coffee picker
		
		Organizer
		
		Facilitator/Coordinator
		
		Consultant
		
		Mediator, Conflict resolutionist
		
		Friend
			Experience colonial legacy
			• Indigenous Communities - problems with economic deprivation, and alcohol abuse and domestic violence
			• Discounting the abilities of the Indigenous
			• Passive or insular Guatemalan elite
			
			Experience with war
			• Familiarity with people's movements
			• Coffee picker for Sandinistas
			• Difficulties of the post-conflict government
			• Peace Accords influencing national policy
			
			Experiences of closeness and organization of Indigenous family and communities
			
			Having close association with Indigenous communities (as opposed to elite communities)
			
			Well-Traveled (inside and outside Guatemala)
			
			Experience with NGOs
			
			Acquired Education
			• Jesuit education (known to be radically democratic in thought)
			• University Education (U.S., British Columbia)
			  – First Nations University, Vancouver, Indigenous pedagogy

Table 3

Edwin, Help for Schools, Inc.

Relationship between positionality and organizational action

Organizational Action (Meso)	Corresponding Positionality (Micro, Meso, Exo, Macro)	Corresponding Intersectionality (Individual)	Lived Experience and Related History (Chrono)
Nonprofit mission focused on rural education - Supports 5 new schools each year (via word of mouth, recommendation, or news reports) - One school permanently sponsored - Visit all schools at least once Development through education - Collaborate with existing community leadership - Partners with communities - Provide means for Guatemalans to develop through their own efforts Growth and transition - Ready to pass on leadership - Seeking more help from funders inside the U.S. - Eventually register in Guatemala	Guatemalan - Sees problems in development - Sees value of being Guatemalan and helping Guatemala - One who sees Guatemalans having to upgrade themselves - One who retains Guatemala as his home - One who values Guatemalan communities - One who is trusted because he is Guatemalan Insider/Outsider (Negotiated space) - Immigrant (reluctant) - Between Countries (Guatemalan/American) - Between villages/communities, rural/urban - Between languages - Between educated and uneducated - Privileged (as in one who has been able to succeed and can help others) - Between manual worker and student One creates own path - Stayed in Guatemala after all his family migrated - Left military for civilian life - Earned civilian degree - Pursued education in U.S. One who helps One who collaborates - With community leadership - With Guatemalan volunteers - With members of the organization - With others to find villages to help - With funders - With Guatemalan government's educational system - With family, community members, etc., to identify schools to help One who is more comfortable in rural settings - Wants to support rural communities One who sees education as a means for upward mobility and opportunity - Sees value in the work of other NGOs - Sees value in nonprofit work - All money goes to projects One who believes in the collective spirit - Enjoys the power and enthusiasm of community - Wants the community to be a part of the work - Sees leadership as temporary position; believes in transition	Male (older) - Husband, father - Sibling/Son Guatemalan - Rural affinity - Traveler, explorer of Guatemala - Indigenous - Spanish speaker - Property/home owner Student - Urban schools - Military (non-graduate) - ESL (Los Angeles) - Civilian (Guatemala, Los Angeles) Immigrant Professional/Employee - Banking industry - Factory worker - Realtor Friend Nonprofit leader, member Volunteer Collaborator Organizer Conduit for help	Rural upbringing - Educated in urban schools Experience with war - Father killed in skirmish with guerrillas - Mother migrated to support family Acquired Education - Military (dropped) - Civilian (acquired degree) Migrated U.S., reluctantly at escalation of war - Considered Los Angeles area too populated - Acquired job in a factory (shift work) - Juggling shift work so he could attend school - Introduction to modern equipment Acquired U.S. education - Moved through ESL program - Attended Real Estate classes; acquired license Well-traveled (inside Guatemala) Moved to less populated Oceanside, CA Group of Guatemalans in Los Angeles and San Diego unite to help Guatemalans suffering from the 2008 Guatemalan Drought