

# Exploring Indigeneity: How Language Impacts People and Culture

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## Part I: Introduction

Indigenous cultures in Latin America have experienced strong and rapid revitalization movements since the last decade of the twentieth century. One country that best demonstrates the recent increase in indigenous pride is Guatemala. Contributing to the resurgence is that 1992 marked *quinientos años*, or 500 years since the “discovery” of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. This anniversary came at a climacteric point in Guatemalan history: the 36-year civil war and genocide was on the decline and would officially come to an end in 1996. As these dates coincided, the inequality in Guatemala became impossible to overlook; “a seed of unity between the indigenous people and Ladinos” was essential for the country to move forward peacefully (Menchu 66). While over half of the relatively small population identified themselves as indigenous, they were not represented in the government or legal systems, nor were either responsive to them. This also included the education system and recognition of indigenous languages. More specifically, the state systems were discriminatory to the indigenous population. Nevertheless, the revitalization and pride within indigenous communities was widespread throughout Guatemala. Many facets of culture resurfaced, among them traditions, ceremonies, clothing, naming, and language (Menchu).

In Guatemala, there are at least 23 official languages (Arriaza and Arias 73). With the exception of Spanish, the remaining languages are indigenous. However, there is still a stigma surrounding their usage. Despite their prevalence, the “usage is often associated with the ‘negative’ values of the ‘traditional’: ignorance, lack of education, and poverty. In contrast, people associate the the dominant language- Spanish- with the ‘positive’ values of the ‘modern’” (England as cited by Yoshioka 8). This is problematic because language usage is considered to be one of the most integral factors in maintaining and expressing a culture (Arriaza and Arias

73). Since schooling is an essential component of learning any language, the education system has the potential for a profound impact. Language retention and usage also contributes to the overall success of the pride in indigeneity movement. This study, based on field research in Guatemala and interviews with indigenous citizens of Guatemala, finds that indigenous languages are best supported in bilingual schools. While Guatemalan public schools are supposed to provide bilingual education, they often fail as a result of unmotivated staff. Therefore, bilingual education is most effective when it is administered by people in the town that it serves, and the progress the Guatemalan indigenous population has made since the 1990s demonstrates how resilient the community is.

## Part II: Guatemala in the 20th Century

Like most countries in Latin America, Guatemala has a rich ancient history and a stunning range of geographical landscapes. Within the population, a key social division is that Guatemalan history differentiates between *ladinos* and *indios*. In today's society, ladino means non-indigenous, while indio means indigenous. The word "ladino" is first used in Guatemala to describe the children of an indigenous woman and a Spanish man in a context such as, "a very Ladino indian" (Pelález 130). Eventually, the term changes from a negative connotation to one of advantage. In the wake of colonialism, "legislation was passed that prohibited Indians from entering Artisan trades controlled by the Spanish. Ladinos were not subject to this legislation" (Pelález 132). Years later, "ladino" would signify "not indian" after legislation passed that recognized the only types of Guatemalans as ladino or indian (Pelález 132). This distinction further separates the two groups: Ladinos are able to choose their work in society, while the indigenous community is forced into indentured servitude. The animosity continues to deepen and contributes to what will be known as some of the darkest chapters in the country's history.

After winning independence in the 19th century, Guatemala had new sets of issues to resolve. Unrest in the country grew as more Guatemalans were subjugated to the unfair and brutal labor conditions that came with working under ladino landowners. Approaching the middle of the 20th century, political leaders rallied for land redistribution to the indigenous population. However, this progress halted in 1954, the year that marks the beginning of a treacherous time period in Guatemalan history. After a military coup d'état ousted the democratically elected president, a vicious 36 year civil war decimated the country. Although, it was slightly unconventional warfare in the sense that the combatants on one side were, "diverse and increasingly militant peasant, worker, indigenous, and political movements and episodic armed insurgencies; on the other, murderous military and paramilitary forces forced financed by domestic economic elites and the United States" (Grandin 5). The peak of the violence is appropriately deemed "la violencia," referring to 1982 and 1983 when General Efraín Ríos Montt controlled the military. Some of the violence perpetrated included rapes and indiscriminate massacres that targeted everyone to women and children. Hundreds of clandestine and unmarked burial grounds remain throughout the country. By the end of the war, over 600 massacres were perpetrated and the casualties numbered 200,000 people (Grandin 5). It is crucial to understand that an overwhelming majority of the rebels fighting against oppression were Maya. Genocide, a term coined in 1948 by Raphael Lemkin and voted on by the United Nations, is defined as "acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" (Lemkin as cited in Verdirame). Therefore, proponents argue that the civil war was a genocide because civilians, including women and children, were targeted specifically for identifying as Maya. During La Violencia, General Efraín Ríos Montt notoriously referred to the systematic killings as "quitar el agua de pes," or

“taking the water from the fish” (Sanford). If the water is the Maya and the fish are guerrillas, the statement implies that without the Maya there would be no water. Without water, the fish die. Essentially, it claims that without the Maya there would be no guerrillas, which effectively demonizes an entire group of people and justifies their death as a means to an end of all subversion.

The violence in Guatemala officially ceased in 1996 when the government and rebel organization signed the Peace Accords. Some of the most promising sections included “resettlement of displaced peoples, equal treatment of the indigenous population and of women, some land redistribution... a greater respect for human rights... [and] building a civilian peace force” (Blum 328). This legislation, if enacted, would have been a monumental victory after so many indigenous families suffered as a result of stolen land. However, they resembled a “wish-list” rather than “a blueprint for social change” (Ross 76). The indigenous community felt that it did not adequately address the incomprehensible toll of damage. Inspired by Chile, they lobbied for truth commissions as an opportunity to heal. Despite the odds, the truth commissions proved successful. Exhumations began as a response to the unmarked graves; in Mayan culture, the burying of the dead is very sacred. Later in the 20th century, the infamous general Ríos Montt was convicted of perpetrating war crimes. The sentence was later reversed and he was waiting to be retried before he died in 2018. Although the reversal was contended, the fact that he was originally sentenced carries incredible significance internationally. The indigenous community of Guatemala is revered for their resilience and persistence in pursuing justice through truth commissions, exhumations, and trials. Today, the indigenous population still faces challenges, but remains strong throughout the nation.

Part III: Linguistic Diversity in Guatemala

Since colonization, the survival of Mayan languages has been threatened. It was not until 1884 that Otto Stoll conducted the first written classification of Guatemalan indigenous languages by comparing different sets of vocabularies, followed by A.L. Kroeber in 1939 whose list is more detailed and separated by Lowland Maya and Highland Maya, and A.M. Halpern in 1942 who categorized based on phonology (McQuown). In 1956, another article was published that re-classifies the languages more meticulously. In it, McQuown refutes earlier classifications and through extensive “comparison of lexical items” and “personal experience to the extent of gathering a fairly sizeable vocabulary” postulates that there are 10 sub-groupings of Mayan languages (McQuown). Throughout these classifications, Spanish remained the language of power throughout the country. A study conducted estimated that by 2010, the number of Guatemalans who identify as indigenous will be 5.88 million, or 41% of the population (World Bank Group).

History demonstrates how the number of Maya in the population has fluctuated. In the year 1950, the reported number of Mayans in the country was 1,495,905 people and the total population was recorded as 2,790,868 people (Lovell and Lutz 400). Over half, or 53.6% to be exact, of the population was Maya. By 1981, the number of Mayans in the population dropped to 41.9% (Lovell and Lutz 400). The stark contrast in numbers is reflective of the atrocities committed during the civil war. Evidently, if the overall population is drastically reduced, the number of speakers of that language will also be reduced. The drastic decrease is part of a series of quantifiable results from the war. While there are still many living indigenous people, there is a trend in which people choose to not identify as indigenous. While Spanish represents a class status, indigenous languages counteract that. This is seen especially through rural to urban migration, usually in the pursuit of higher education. Since there are less indigenous speakers in

cities, those speakers interact more with speakers of Spanish (Yoshioka 11). This effect causes a noticeable shift in language usage, as “the imbalance between the Maya and Spanish languages pushes Maya people to rapidly learn Spanish and, in the process, erode their own” (Arriaza and Arias 74). For some Guatemalans, Spanish and indigenous languages can be seen as in competition with one another. The prestige of social advancement comes at a cost of heritage loss. While this is a realistic concern, the indigenous revitalization movement counteracts it by encouraging indigenous Guatemalans to practice multiple languages.

Similar to before the civil war, Spanish is still “the language within which all... groups communicate; it facilitates business transactions and international trade, and articulates the legal and educational systems” (Arriaza and Arias 73). However, the resurgence of indigenous languages cannot be denied. Today, there are still 24 recognized languages in Guatemala that all survived the war; 21 are Mayan (K’iche’, Mam, Poqomam, Ixil, some of the most popular), 2 are non-Mayan (Xinca and Garifuna), and the final is Spanish (Grandin 8). A large contributing factor is the renewed indigenous identity that is inspired by transitional justice movements and assertion for equal rights. Another element of the increased language usage is indigenous bilingual education. Today, there is an emphasis placed on children learning not only Spanish, but also their family’s native tongue.

#### Part IV: Global Indigeneity Revitalization

The later half of the 20th century marks a global indigenous rights movement that receives momentum and support in nations among nearly every continent. In 1977 and 1981, the United Nations hosts two conferences regarding indigenous rights. This international recognition is crucial because it provides a platform that elucidates the harsh realities of colonialism still prevalent. However, it is important to understand that “strong transnational

networks and shared claims already existed between differently situated indigenous peoples prior to UN interest in indigenous issues, as did an emerging collective indigenous identity” (Morgan 277). Latin America is one of the most, if not the most, successful examples of resurgence in indigeneity sweeping across an entire continent. Global recognition continues well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with companies such as World Bank compiling reports on indigenous Latin America, often citing the discrepancies between indigenous and ladino communities.

One area where Latin American indigenous groups experience success is politics. For instance, the *Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE) program, established in 1986, was quintessential because it, “unified the different indigenous groups of coast, sierra, and jungle and their federations as different ‘nationalities’ and thus fundamentally embodied the ‘plurinational’ concept” (Jameson 65). In 2008, CONAIE successfully won recognition across Ecuador for its, “plurinational state, indigenous control over their own territories, and and acceptance of indigenous languages as official languages of the country along with Spanish” (Jameson 69). CONAIE remains successful in the present day. Another nation to gain international acclaim for the political advancement of indigenous peoples is Bolivia. In the 2002 president election, Evo Morales was the first indigenous man elected to the position. As a result, “Bolivians watched in awe... highland Indians, lowland indigenous people, and peasants - took their places in the national congress” (Postero 190). Indigenous political parties continue to protest against injustices, such as the construction of a natural gas pipeline or a clean water tax.

Socially, Colombia is a nation that implemented successful reforms after the Constitution of 1991 was implemented (Rathgeber 109). Indigenous groups enjoy “direct funding for bilingual schools, to build health centers with traditional and western medicine, and to set in place a water and energy infrastructure within a communal regime (not privatized)”

(Rathgeber 111). Mexico and Peru are among the successful countries that implemented indigenous bilingual education opportunities. Not only does education personally benefit the students, but it also served as a method to, “empower themselves and demand that the state grant them rights as indigenous citizens” (García and Lucero 175). Investing in the education of a community drastically increases the likelihood of success and involvement in other endeavors.

#### Part V: History of Indigenous Bilingual Education in Guatemala

In 1945, President Arévalo was one of the first elected officials to promote indigenous education. In years prior, education reforms implemented were not designed for the Maya. Trained as a teacher, Arévalo understood the value of education and implemented “bilingual education in Maya languages, and school expansion to improve access to and quality of education for urban and rural students alike” (Maxwell cited in Dym 246). These changes continue under President Jacobo Árbenz but are halted during the civil war. More specifically, there “was a state sponsored prohibition of teaching indigenous languages in schools, a change that would not be reversed for decades” (Yoshioka 8). Education reformation reversed this progress at the expense of banning indigenous education. MacVean and Nieves’s archetypal student is depicted as someone who will go to preschool (not mandatory), elementary school (mandatory), and an optional *bachillerato* program comprised of three years of additional schooling, plus two that are more specific toward the student’s university aspirations (MacVean and Nieves 18). The distinction between Maya and Ladino is not in the article, however the proposal of the *bachillerato* program and university implies that these privileges are only Ladino. Education inequality was not readdressed until after the war ended.

One of the initial postwar methods of increasing indigenous schools is the *Programa Nacional de Autogestión para el Desarrollo Educativo*, or PRONADE. Its mission was to build

more indigenous schools and adequately staff them to ensure access to education for primary children. This program “has enhanced community and parental participation in rural schools, while significantly contributing to the expansion of educational services into rural and indigenous communities” (Löning 170). There is an extensive process to be considered for funding, including proving that there is a location for the school, it is at least three kilometers away from another school, there must be at least 25 primary school children in the community, and there cannot be any teachers already on “government payroll” (Löning 181). Funding for PRONADE is achieved through a variety of units and is overseen by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education. Quantitatively, the results prove successful: by 2003, “about 372,000 children were enrolled in primary schools of PRONADE” (Löning 189). By 2015, it was concluded that there was a “significant improvement of about 36 percent in the probability of completing primary education in Guatemala” (World Bank 63). This is especially remarkable because children born to indigenous parents are more likely to live in poverty. In 2000, children born to indigenous parents were 18.8% less likely to complete “primary or higher” education, and in 2011 the chances were 11.9% less likely (World Bank). Conversely, “secondary and higher” education experienced the reverse effect: in 2000, Guatemalans were 8.7% less likely to complete it, and in 2011 they were 12.7% less likely. This could possibly be the result of migration. Furthermore, factors “such as level of education of the parents and size or location of the household” pale in comparison to the negative effects that indigeneity has (World Bank 61). Essentially, children born to an indigenous parent who has a college education are still going to be less likely to complete school because of their indigenous status. Consequently, poverty hinders education in multiple ways. One of the most common disadvantages for children living in poverty is that they often have to drop out of school to start working and helping the family financially. Or, the

family simply cannot afford to pay for secondary education. Qualitative measures, such as the quality of education provided and its impact on students, are more difficult to measure. There are still gaps within the program, but ultimately it represents the success of rural indigenous communities to organize, rally, and succeed in advancing their children's education.

PRONADE is an example of an indigenous bilingual education program, or IBE. The goal of IBE is for children to be literate in both Spanish and an indigenous language. While there are many benefits of IBE, their implementation can be futile. Unless "necessary structural changes" are addressed, the success of IBE will be limited (Yoshioka 10). One of the most important changes would be addressing poverty. Not only is education impacted, but also employment and health. From 2000 to 2011, the probability of indigenous Guatemalans working in the informal sector increased from 9.34% to 14.5% (World Bank). Working in the informal sector creates job instability, volatile income, minimal (if any) benefits, and no safety regulations. Additionally, access to quality healthcare is limited to nonexistent in certain indigenous communities. In Peru, for instance, "the life expectancy of indigenous people is 30 years shorter in the Peruvian highlands than in Lima" (World Bank 30). These instances are only a few of the many areas in which indigenous people are disadvantaged. The need for structural reforms is further demonstrated through the clear polarization that remains between indigenous and Ladino communities. Especially at younger ages, students are more inclined to choose which language to speak based on acceptance among peers. These choices are detrimental because "often times it's young children making this decision to stop using the ancestral language and then when those children grow up the language is effectively gone" (*The Linguists*). Clearly, educational environments can cause nearly irreparable changes in the realm of indigenous language retention. Even external academic actors can provide aide in a way that is

not truly altruistic. When outside academics publish information about indigenous communities, it is not uncommon to use the wrong spelling (Mateo-Toldeo). Not only is this belittling the communities, but it also propels misinformation forward. At a political level, different indigenous groups are being improperly identified. How can a group achieve equality if the public cannot spell their name? Thus, while IBE is magnanimous in its premise, it is problematic when it is being implemented in a top-down manner. A solution to this issue is its reverse: domestic grassroots organizations that work to spread influence.

#### Part VI: Educational System in Guatemala

My experiences volunteering in Guatemala permitted me to better understand how the current education system is constructed. The public school system in indigenous towns is unsatisfactory at best. Since there is usually only one school building, the morning session is for elementary level students and the afternoon is for what someone from the U.S. would consider a middle school level. The following observations are from my time in the middle school part of the day. Of a four to five hour school day, there is a 30-minute recess. There is no electricity in the building. There is a lack of cohesion and order among the classes; children anywhere from 11 to 16 years old are in the same classroom. The amount of students who complete the homework are far and few in between. Often, the teachers are unable to effectively manage a group of adolescents. Time that should be dedicated to learning is often lost to unproductivity. While it is beneficial that instructors teach partly in Mam, the Spanish classes are nearly useless due to their unproductivity. A crucial point in IBE is that both Spanish and an indigenous language, in this case Mam, are being fostered. A majority of the teachers who work in these indigenous towns are not from that specific town. Locals feel that because the teachers have no personal connection, they are not as invested in the success of the children as they should be. It

was not uncommon for teachers to leave the classroom for lengthy and unspecified amounts of time. It was also not uncommon for another volunteer and myself to be harassed by the male teachers. Public education in rural, poverty stricken towns ends with middle school. Secondary schools, or the U.S. equivalent to high schools, are available in more populous cities. However, many of these institutions are boarding schools, which are not funded by the government.

Commuting day to day is not an option because the distance is too far and the risk of being robbed in certain locations is high. Since many indigenous families cannot afford to pay the tuition, education becomes class based.

#### Part VII: Case Study- Grupo Cajolá

In some parts of Guatemala, non-governmental organizations have worked to address the failures of the public education system and the systemic factors that marginalize indigenous communities. One example is Grupo Cajolá, whose mission is “*juntos caminemos que nadie se quede atrás,*” which literally translates to, “let’s walk together so nobody is left behind.” Cajolá is an indigenous town located in Quetzaltenango, one of the highest altitude areas of the country. The native language in this town is Mam. Their mission is best embodied through their goal “to create a Cajolá that no one is forced to leave in order to survive through collaboration and community building” (Grupo Cajolá). This is accomplished through a variety of mediums, notably through the economic women’s cooperative MayaMam Weavers. By producing beautiful hand-woven products, women are afforded the opportunity to earn an income to better provide for themselves and their families. The products are mostly sold in the United States, however there is a market in some Guatemalan cities as well. Other initiatives of the NGO include a carpentry cooperative, a honeybee harvesting cooperative, a free internet center, and most notably, a free preschool and aftercare program. In the summer of 2018, I had the

opportunity to volunteer with them in Cajolá. Throughout the morning, I taught English lessons to any weavers who were interested. The interest spread, and I also worked with relatives of the weavers. In the afternoons, I worked at the aftercare program “Ayudando con las Tareas,” or the Helping with Homework program. I was fortunate enough to live with a woman and her son who also live in Cajolá. Her son is enrolled in the local school and regularly attends the aftercare program. However, she is aware of how poorly managed the public school is run, so she often makes her son practice subjects at home.

Grupo Cajolá’s preschool program, officially titled “*Xnaq’tz Nab’l Q’chman*” or Teaching the Wisdom of Our Elders Preschool, is rooted in the Reggio Emilia philosophy. The main focuses through this principle include, “an interpretation of teachers as researchers, curriculum as long-term projects, the role of symbolic languages in child development and advocacy, the role of the environment, and an interpretation of parents as partners in the educational enterprise” (New 5). Essentially, the view of education is transformed into a critical asset not only to children, but also to the community. Teaching the Wisdom of Our Elders Preschool is instructed in both Mam, the mother tongue of the community, and Spanish. While learning Spanish is a focus of the school, instruction is primarily taught in Mam. By learning in two languages, students are given an advantage because they can retain and celebrate their culture as well as learn one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. One of the greatest accomplishments of the preschool is its assistance in securing grant funds for publications of children's books written in Mam. Not only are these books the first ever written and published in Mam, but they are some of the first indigenous children’s books.

To better understand the origins of the pre-school, I interviewed Caryn Maxim, the woman responsible for co-creating the organization. Aside from Guatemala, the NGO works out

of Morristown, New Jersey. Caryn reiterated the Reggio Emilia approach, noting that it is quintessentially based in local culture. It was apparent that teaching the school in Mam, or the mother tongue, would be most beneficial. When I asked Caryn to elaborate on the genesis of the picture books, she first cited the 1996 Peace Accords on Indigenous Rights, noting that they included bilingual teaching in schools. From an academic standpoint, work was done to organize and condense all alphabets of indigenous languages into one uniform alphabet. This still allowed for many different sounds, but it united the languages in one common alphabet. When Caryn was looking for books written in Mam, the only ones that existed were those that taught how to read the language. So, they decided that they needed to publish books. Grupo Cajolá applied to a National Geographic grant program that was centered on strengthening indigenous culture, and ultimately they received the grants that funded their first two books. The idea was to sell them and make enough money to publish more books. Currently, all of the preschool teachers are writing another book and are almost ready for publication, adding four or five new books to the collection. While the teachers are responsible for the written content, Grupo Cajolá's publisher (who has a store in Guatemala City) provides immense support by contributing the graphic designs of the books.

One of the most critical transformations for the school is the building itself. Caryn explained that they created the initial space by moving looms and emptying out the alternative break space to dedicate area to a classroom. Initially, Caryn mapped out the space but the teachers then asked if they could move it around, to which she was delighted. Over time, they rearranged it to be more suitable for how kids work and play. Caryn described the first classroom as, "sad because it was a concrete floor and there weren't many windows. Reggio Emilia is about light, and there we are hunkered down in a space that's not very beautiful. To

me the biggest and most exciting change about the new space is the huge change in lighting, with the glass skylights in the roof.” She went on to explain that Reggio Emilia philosophy states that you should work with your school in a way that reflects your culture and how it reflects children. One of the challenges that Cajolá faces is deciding where to put your children in a town that’s very poor. Caryn describes the space as “not luxury, but bright and open and in an environment that’s conducive to being beautiful. That was really the genesis of that. And when we build our school, whenever that is, we’ll use adobe architecture, which is traditional. We’ll also add steel support so they don’t fall down, because we want to make beautiful adobe.” As a whole, speaking with Caryn about the origins and her vision demonstrates the level of commitment that she has for the project. Currently, she is delegating more tasks with bigger responsibilities to members of the community. This initiative is to ensure that Grupo Cajolá continues to prosper even after Caryn is unable to continue working someday. The work she has accomplished so far has laid a strong foundation to continue expanding upon.

To better understand the effectiveness of Grupo Cajolá, I interviewed three residents of the town. All of the participants remain anonymous and speak both Spanish and Mam (pseudonyms are used in this paper). The interviews were conducted in Spanish via online correspondence. The questions I asked them pertained to their language learning and school experiences, what languages they speak to their children at home, how beneficial Grupo Cajolá’s preschool and aftercare programs are, and what advertisements in local cities meant to them. I was interested in knowing about how they learned languages, since things like picture books were not available to them during childhood. The contrast, if there is a contrast, between generations can serve as evidence supporting or refuting the claim that the new learning initiatives are beneficial. Finally, I wanted to know about the impact the advertisements in Xela

(the closest city to Cajolá via a 30 minute car ride) have to indigenous citizens. While Mam wouldn't be the dominant indigenous language in that region, there is still no indigenous language representation in any marketing. Since responses were not compulsory, most questions were answered by everyone, but there were some that went unnoticed (possibly due to a lack of in person communication).

Flor learned the Mam language by talking with her parents when she was a little girl. It wasn't until she entered school that she learned Spanish. She prefers to speak to her daughters in Mam and will continue to do so. "It has been a beautiful experience for my daughters to be learning so much and I know that it will serve as a great benefit for my girls and I. My daughters do not attend the Helping with Homework program because they are still too young but I know that it is important for the children that attend."

Ana explained that she has attended school and learned languages through her family and her education. At home, she speaks to her daughter in Mam because "I prefer that she learns Mam first as her mother tongue." When asked about the aftercare program, she thinks that it is beneficial for her daughter because "I do not have time to support her with her homework, and I as a mother work to be able to give her a little better education."

Roberto attended school for 8 years. "My first language is my mother tongue, and it's called Mam. I learned it from my parents." His second language is *Castellano* or Spanish, which he learned at home with his parents and at school with his friends. Roberto's third language is English, which he learned in school, at work, and from his friends in the United States. Roberto has two daughters, and at home he speaks with them in Mam, Spanish, and a little bit of English. He prefers speaking to the girls in Mam, and again references it as his mother tongue. Both of his daughters are registered in school, and it has been "greatly

beneficial” for intellectual development and for the development of personal ability. He describes the opportunity the school provides as, “it has been the best experience I have had as a father since my daughters have developed and are able to contribute to the development of the society. The Helping with Homework program has also been a tool to continue my daughters’ personal development since we have trained teachers to contribute to the development of the community.” Roberto feels that the advertisements in Xela are only there to let people know that there is availability in the business market.

Overall, the proof of success for Grupo Cajolá lies within the responses from its members. Collectively, education has bettered the lives of children in the town. Their educational progress does not seem to be hindered by speaking and learning in two languages, but rather keeps them connected and engaged with their culture. Whereas town public schools are understaffed by outside teachers who often are ineffective at their jobs, employing members of the town in programs like Ayudando con las Tareas ensures that the teachers care about the quality of education being administered. This was evident during my time there, as students were constantly engaged and practicing reading, writing, and other academic related initiatives. While their children are being cared for in school and aftercare, more parents are afforded the opportunity to seek employment. Specifically with Grupo Cajolá, workers are ensured fair compensation and a safe working environment. The business within the company is transparent, which adds another level of accountability. Employment with this type of company has the potential to challenge, and even reverse, the negative trends that World Bank reports have seen in the first decade of the 21st century. Despite the draconian suffering that the government imposed on the indigenous community, they survived and demanded accountability. By challenging impunity, indigenous people have noticeably prospered by mobilizing in ways to

better their communities. The early success of Grupo Cajolá and their educational programs demonstrates the immense resiliency within the Guatemalan indigenous community and their commitment to continue to prosper.

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