
George Okrah

Existence and Coexistence: Class Strata and Coexistence

Project Goals

- ◆ Assist in the planning, organization, and publicity of a major conference, “Tercer Encuentro y Simposio Internacional en Pluralismo Juridico y Antropologia Legal,” (The Third Meeting and International Symposium on Judicial Pluralism and Legal Anthropology) that grew out of a need for the modification of the legal structures to reflect the multicultural and pluralistic makeup of Guatemala
- ◆ Develop an understanding of the nature of the conflict and the challenges facing my community in the post conflict era

Personal Goals

- ◆ Examine the various components of this unique conflict including its transition from being class-based to becoming more focused on ethnic lines and the conditions that precipitated the peace process
- ◆ Improve my Spanish language skills, including the nuances of the language that are specific to my host community
- ◆ Incorporate myself into a new culture as much as possible

Activities

- ◆ Organized a panel discussion to introduce the idea of the conference in my host community, located speakers and secured a venue
- ◆ Publicized the discussion by designing and posting flyers and speaking with individual members of the community in person
- ◆ Served as Webmaster, managing the conference’s online presence



Above— George’s host family from Macalajau, a village where Celas Maya has a scholarship foundation that uses education to empower communities affected by the war



Right— George’s main host family: mother, Liz and daughter, Maria Liz

Important Learnings

- ◆ Coexistence work is incredibly challenging, especially when victims of a conflict do not have available avenues to reconcile and when the conditions that induced the conflict continue to exist.
- ◆ Spending time in another culture is an invaluable experience that exposes you to a completely different reality. It is possible to live off \$3.00 a day, buy Cipro (the antibiotic for anthrax) over the counter, eat a diet of beans and pasta and feel good, and fit 100 people into a bus designed for 40 and still get to its location safely.
- ◆ Although a coexistence effort, such as a peace accord, may be impeccable in theory, it is not helpful unless it is designed for the particular environment where it is being implemented.
- ◆ The best way to avoid frustration and embarrassment when speaking a language in which you are not fluent is to stop worrying. That is when you begin to communicate effectively.

Right— Market day in Quetzaltenango: the first Sunday of every month

Below— A little girl working as a street vendor during market day: Often children are sent out to earn wages selling items such as candy and fabric.





This is the most beautiful place I have ever been. It is set in a grid like New York City with Avenidas and Calles (avenues and streets). The streets are paved with cobblestone and although each house is tailored to a specific taste, the grid makes them all look the same. There is only one way to get in and one way out. You can probably circle the town in an hour. From the panaderias (bakeries) and dulcerias (sweet goods) to the ruins serving as a testament to the time when Antigua was Guatemala's capital, this place would capture anyone's attention. At night I go to a nearby pharmacy. The owner, Julio, is a pharmacist who serves as a sort of doctor in the community. His daughter, niece, and two assistants, help run the pharmacy. They have been very hospitable since I arrived and therefore I often spend time with them. His two grandchildren are adorable. They yell, "carga me!" (pick me up) I toss them in the air and they

laugh. One day, Julio brought me a painting of "Calle de Las Campanas," a street overlooking one of the three volcanic mountains surrounding the town. It captured everything I had wanted to describe but could not. He signed it, "con cariño para usted, Jorge. Recuerdos de Antigua, Guatemala. 06/06/02.

Julio Mendez Jr."



A view of Antigua