

## From War to Peace: The Reintegration Experience of Guatemalan Ex-Combatants: A Grounded Theory Inquiry

The reintegration of ex-combatants has become a major focus of cease-fire agreements in the past 20 years (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007). However, the success of these programs remains elusive. In this study, I interview members of Nuevo Horizonte, an intentional cooperative comprised of Guatemalan ex-guerrillas who fought during the 36 year civil war that ended in 1996. These men and women reflect on two questions: What was the process of reintegration like? and What advice do you have for others who are going through the process? Using grounded theory, I develop a set of themes or strategies that these ex-combatants utilized during this transformative process to achieve a degree of successful reintegration: being united, being autonomous, being connected, being visionary, and being role models. The collective voice of these ex-combatants calls into question conventional reintegration programs in two major ways. Firstly, it challenges the premise that demobilization is necessary to maintain stability and peace in a post-conflict society by showcasing how their unity was integral to their reintegration experience. Secondly, it challenges the Development Model (where ex-combatants are viewed through a deficit lens and where outside experts deliver solutions) by highlighting how reliance on their own capacity engendered a sense of empowerment and resulted in their successful reintegration. These ex-combatants believe their experience can be used to assist other ex-combatants who are reintegrating into post-conflict societies around the world.