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THE OPEN SECRET OF GUATEMALAN MIGRATION AND GRASSROOTS POLITICS IN GREATER LOS ANGELES



DR. JULIO ORELLANA

Visiting Assistant Professor of American Studies
Scripps College



THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2026
12:00 PM – 2:00 PM



HMNSS 1500
UC RIVERSIDE



Light refreshments will be served.



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ABSTRACT

This presentation demonstrates how a migrant community made up of indigenous Maya and non-indigenous mestizo/ladino people in the Greater Los Angeles region play an essential social and economic role in the U.S. and Guatemala. Despite their indispensability, they are twice exploited for their service work without any government representation or economic democracy. First, in Guatemala as a group who earns below the necessary wages for their social reproduction, and second when they are treated as a flexible workforce due to their lack of legal status and their vulnerability to state violence. However, in the face of authoritarianism, violence, and policing across multiple borders, grassroots organizations in Guatemala and abroad have continued to organize against overlapping structures of power that impact this migrant community. I argue that given the historical context and development of capitalism, Guatemalans as a social class of forcefully displaced migrants are engaging in politics at the local, national, and transnational level in distinct ways.

BIO

Dr. Julio Orellana is Visting Assistant Professor of American Studies at Scripps College. He earned his Ph.D. in the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Riverside (2023). He was a 2023-2025 University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Julio's scholarship has been recognized by numerous prestigious awards including the Ford Foundation Dissertation Year Fellowship, the UC President's Pre-Professoriate Fellowship, the Haynes Lindley Foundation Dissertation Year Fellowship, and the New York University Faculty First-Look Program.

Dr. Orellana is an interdisciplinary social-science scholar whose primary areas of research are Latino Studies, Latino Politics, and Latin American Studies. His recent publication (2025), *Racialized Guatemalan Migrant Labor and Grassroots Civil Societies in the Greater Los Angeles Region* was published in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (JREP)* with Cambridge University Press. Dr. Orellana's work has also appeared in the London School of Economics and Political Science's USAPP website, the Sage Encyclopedia of Refugee Studies and the *Encyclopedia of Critical Political Science*.

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