

PEDRO PITARCH, SHANNON SPEED, and XOCHITL LEYVA SOLANO (eds.): *Human Rights in the Maya Region: Global Politics, Cultural Contentions, and Moral Engagements*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008.

Over the last decade a dominant and controversial debate has emerged over human rights in the Maya regions of Chiapas and Guatemala. Whether broadly defined as cultural, ethnic, and political, or defined as a complex of fundamental rights owed to all human beings, the issue of human rights has been on the lips of politicians of all stripes, of cultural and political activists, and of Catholic and Protestant clergy, as well as Mayas at the local level who are trying to make sense of the globalized world they are living in.

Understanding exactly what the concept of human rights means to Mayas would shed light on the ways that Mayas themselves understand their social, political, and economic relations with other Mayas, with non-Maya others, within the state, and within international and transnational contexts. Mayas' cultural conceptualizations reveal the problematics of particular and universal vantage points. They lay bare the specific politics that are behind the rhetoric and the sometimes heated arguments that surround human rights. *Human Rights in the Maya Region*, edited by Pitarch, Speed, and Leyva Solano, is a collection of fourteen essays by cultural anthropologists who have taken on the daunting task of making sense of Maya concepts of human rights and the complex political terrain in which human rights debates are enmeshed.

Like many edited volumes, *Human Rights in the Maya Region* does not hold together from a consistent theoretical perspective or a consistent methodological basis. However, this is beneficial for readers, for it clearly shows the striking difference between scholars who take a more cultural perspective and those who focus more on the political and legal contexts in which the Mayas are situated. The cultural perspective, focusing on Maya conceptualizations, is presented by Robert Carmack in "Perspectives on the Politics of Human Rights in Guatemala," and Pedro Pitarch in "The Labyrinth of Translation: A Tzeltal Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Both essays illustrate the complex ways in which global, universal human rights discourses enter into political discourses in Maya community politics. The essays that focus on the political and legal contexts of the Mayas are "Rights of the Poor: Progressive Catholicism and Indigenous Resistance in Chiapas," by Christine Kovic, and "Resistance and the Red de Defensores Comunitarios in Chiapas," by Shannon Speed and Alvaro Reyes, though it would be unfair to claim that any of the contributors limit their analysis to just one position.

Several essays—Rachel Seider’s “Legal Globalization and Human Rights: Constructing the Rule of Law in Postconflict Guatemala,” Stener Ekern’s “Are Human Rights Destroying the Natural Balance of All Things? The Difficult Encounter between International Law and Community Law in Mayan Guatemala,” and Irma Otzoy’s “Indigenous Law and Gender Dialogues”—explore the various legal elements at play: the laws themselves, how the laws are understood within Maya communities, and whether the state is able to uphold human rights. David Stoll’s essay, “Human Rights, Land Conflicts, and Memory of the Violence in the Ixil Country of Northern Quiché,” stands apart from the others, in that it is the only one that considers economic conditions and conflicts.

The volume includes seven Guatemalan case studies and four Chiapas case studies. The other three essays—an introduction by Speed and Leyva Solano; Rodolfo Stavenhagen’s “Cultural Rights and Human Rights: A Social Science Perspective”; and the commentary that concludes the volume by Richard Wilson—provide the necessary historical, cultural, political, and scholarly contextualization that makes the individual case studies more comprehensible to non-specialists. By far the weakest aspect of the book’s analysis of human rights is that there is so little discussion of economic rights. Where, for example, are the ways that Maya farmers, merchants, and wage-laborers comprehend their human rights? And how do these people see the role of the church, the state, and international non-governmental organizations in upholding those rights? Given that the overview chapters emphasize the cultural diversity of the region, that Mayas do not have uniform ways of engaging human rights discourses, that they lack a single universal way of understanding human rights, and that they lack confidence that the state can protect those rights, it is somewhat surprising that there is so little consideration of economic conditions.

It is also important, as least for us Mayanists, to step back and reassess what we have defined as the Maya region. Despite the vast diversity of Mayas from within the region, the contributors illustrate the utility of conceptualizing the region as culturally Maya, since it forces us to remember the historical roots of the region and the converging and diverging colonial and post-colonial legacies that have impacted and continue to impact Mayas. Such a reassessment, however, should also look at the ways that the two countries are tied together today. The transnational flow of Mayas looking for work or fleeing intolerable political conditions persists. Cultural, economic, educational, and political exchanges between Chiapas and Guatemala occur fairly regularly between Mayas. An analysis of these exchanges would have yielded additional understanding of Mayas’ conceptualizations of human rights and states’ roles with respect to those rights.

The strength of the volume is the attention it pays to how human rights discourses are part of complex legal and governmental processes that cut across

local, national, and transnational spaces. Each of the contributors has already produced important works on human rights and politics in the Maya region, and the collection of essays that places Chiapan and Guatemalan case studies next to each other helps to tease out similarities and differences between the two countries. Indigenouness and the state's ways of recognizing, implementing, and upholding human rights plays out very differently in each country. In fact, just what is considered human rights in each country shifts from the local to the national in different ways.

Walter E. Little

SUNY at Albany

ALFONSO W. QUIROZ: *Corrupt Circles: A History of Unbound Graft in Peru*. Washington, D.C. and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

“La coima ilimitada”, reza el subtítulo de la magnífica obra del historiador peruano que reside en Estados Unidos y es profesor en el Baruch College and Graduate Center de la Universidad de Nueva York. Más que una radiografía, puede decirse que el texto constituye una suerte de resonancia magnética funcional de 250 años de corrupción sistémica, en un país que interiorizó hasta la médula las prácticas patrimonialistas que caracterizaron al imperio español.

“Coima ilimitada” es una traducción libre, ya que, ¿sorpresa, sorpresa?, los ciudadanos, Quiroz diría súbditos, de este país de maravillas no podemos leer el libro en nuestra lengua materna. Un tema tan incómodo para tantos, que recorre toda la vida de la nación y se encuentra en las raíces de los árboles genealógicos más emblemáticos, suena mejor en inglés.

Quiroz revisa el significado histórico de la corrupción y su impacto en la configuración del Perú, especialmente en términos de desarrollo potencial frustrado. A lo largo de ciclos consecutivos, vemos cómo algunos intentos de consolidar el imperio de la ley, la regulación de oportunidades para todos, el control de los poderosos por función o por dinero, se estrellaron contra una alianza de poderes fácticos, intereses particulares y la ausencia de un servicio público profesional.

Quiroz documenta cómo en el siglo XVIII Antonio de Ulloa denunció injusticias, negociados y abusos, pero sus esfuerzos y algunas tímidas iniciativas venidas de ultramar sucumbieron a los apetitos de funcionarios reales y elites criollas, que, en las postrimerías de la colonia, colaboraron para retrasar lo más posible una independencia que vino de fuera.

El periodo republicano, con sus libertadores extranjeros y una elite aterrorizada por la indiada andina, se inició con una guerra de caudillos que no hicieron