

J. T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall: Globalization, Development, and the Making of Modern Guatemala*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2012. 310 pages. Paper: \$24.95. Cloth: \$89.95. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5131-3 (Paper). ISBN: 978-0-8223-5120-7 (Cloth).

In *the Mayan in the Mall*, J.T Way examines the story of Guatemala and the factors that have truncated the socioeconomic development of a large segment of the population: the indigenous Maya. In the introduction, Way explains that recently tourism has become Guatemala's main source of income, and that the main tourist attraction is Guatemala's indigenous Maya population. Mayan traditions, customs and costumes are exotic and beautiful enough to attract significant tourist traffic in spite of the small Central American nation's reputation of political insecurity. Way then discusses the irony that the country's main economic resource has also been the segment of the population that has been historically most neglected, ostracized and persecuted by its government. Putting the Mayan in the mall is a way of saying that now Guatemala is exploiting this part of its population in new, commercialized manner. To explain this process, the book surveys the tumultuous history of the country, paying special attention to the history of the Guatemalan Maya during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Maya do not form a homogenous group, but they do share many of the same scourges across the different ethnic groups like widespread malnutrition and illiteracy. The Maya have been and continue to be the victims of ethnic and cultural repression at the hands of the different incarnations of authoritarian and abusive governments that have ruled Guatemala during the age of modernity.

The study deftly covers the authoritarian regimes that first failed to incorporate the Maya in their diverse failed attempts to modernize the country, rather choosing to exploit them as a cheap or even compulsory workforce. During the second half of the century, and after the fall of Dictator Jorge Ubico, two democratically supported presidents had a small window of opportunity to enact real change for the Maya, but the second ruler, Jacobo Arbenz, was swiftly deposed from power by the CIA-supported military. This prevented real social reform and attempts at redistribution of land and wealth between the small ruling elite and the indigenous Maya. What followed were decades of military leaders and juntas that engaged in repressive and even genocidal campaigns in order to subdue the Maya population that had grown restless and frustrated with the pervasive deleterious state of affairs. Some of the Mayan gravitated towards the emerging promise of communism and organized in work unions or guerrilla groups, inspired by the Cuban experiment, but the US-supported military domestic regimes only intensified their violent efforts to suppress the Maya uprisings.

One of the real strengths of this work, aside of the straight-forward chronological narrative, is that it puts the Mayan people at the core of every issue. Other studies on the topic usually provide useful factual information along with a few anecdotal references, but in the *Mayan in the Mall* the challenges facing Guatemala are not addressed from a distance but rather through the eyes of the Maya. Plentiful examples of poverty, malnutrition and violence are understood vicariously through real victims. We learn of the near-impossibility of creating a traditional nuclear family, of early death and pregnancy and the difficulty of keeping a steady job of meager income through the heart-wrenching and oft-repeated story of the Pedro Bor and his family, whose members ended up destitute, forcibly split from each other and dead. Or we learn about the dangerous challenges that face the merchants of the insalubrious and gang infested "Terminal" (the main bus terminal located at the heart of Guatemala City) through the experiences of street vendor Beatriz Cux Lopez and her help. In this work we not only look at the Maya, we see them and we see through them.

Something noteworthy about this work is that, particularly in chapter 5, we are confronted with a pretty extensive mention of political and economic entities, from government created administrative bodies to foreign nongovernmental organizations. The pace at which they are brought into the discussion becomes a little rushed and it is somewhat difficult to keep track of which

organization is in charge of a particular project, since a few of them are only mentioned to support a smaller detail in the narrative of the text. This could be particularly challenging if the reader is not closely familiar with Guatemalan contemporary history. It may have been more useful to concentrate on fewer institutions and to provide a more in-depth look at the selections. With that said, none of the examples provided were irrelevant and did contribute to paint a rich picture of the staggering amount of forces that are tugging at the fabric of Mayan identity and in many ways preventing this amazing group of peoples to blossom in the manner in which they are undoubtedly capable of doing.

The work is both informative and enlightening. I would recommend it to readers seeking to understand the current challenges of Guatemalan society, notably those which the Maya face, from a perspective centered on the human experience.

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