



Mayan Voices for Human Rights: Displaced Catholics in Highland Chiapas (Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture Series)

Christine Kovic

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In the last decades of the twentieth century, thousands of Mayas were expelled, often violently, from their homes in San Juan Chamula and other highland communities in Chiapas, Mexico, by fellow Mayas allied with the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). State and federal authorities generally turned a blind eye to these human rights abuses, downplaying them as local conflicts over religious conversion and defense of cultural traditions. The expelled have organized themselves to fight not only for religious rights, but also for political and economic justice based on a broad understanding of human rights.

This pioneering ethnography tells the intertwined stories of the new communities formed by the Mayan exiles and their ongoing efforts to define and defend their human rights. Focusing on a community of Mayan Catholics, the book describes the process by which the progressive Diocese of San Cristóbal and Bishop Samuel Ruiz García became powerful allies for indigenous people in the promotion and defense of human rights. Drawing on the words and insights of displaced Mayas she interviewed throughout the 1990s, Christine Kovic reveals how the exiles have created new communities and lifeways based on a shared sense of faith (even between Catholics and Protestants) and their own concept of human rights and dignity. She also uncovers the underlying political and economic factors that drove the expulsions and shows how the Mayas who were expelled for not being "traditional" enough are in fact basing their new communities on traditional values of duty and reciprocity.

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