

commonly, UJC and Communist militants' (p. 323), where is the footnote to accompany this claim?

In a curious way, by questioning, challenging and pulling the grand narrative of Cuba's revolution apart, Guerra is putting forward her own grand narrative. Those who do not fit this interpretation are dismissed or ignored and as a result the persuasiveness of the book is undermined somewhat. Similarly, by excluding the international and external influences on Cuba, I think Guerra misses an important ingredient in a complex story of radicalisation that had as much to do with other Latin American visitors to the island and Cuban interactions with third world nationalists and revolutionaries as it did with the geopolitics of US–Soviet confrontation over the island. Thankfully, however, this is a book that will be debated, questioned and discussed, unlike so many of the works of her protagonists. One sincerely hopes that this book will also one day be available and openly debated in Cuba. As Guerra powerfully laments at the end of her book, 'decades of silencing conflict and repressing debate has [*sic*] left a highly atomized society and a legacy of fractured knowledge of the Revolution's own past in its wake' (p. 362). What she has done with *Visions of Power* is to address this legacy and contribute significantly to piecing that knowledge together. To be sure, there are other pieces that will need to be added, but this is at the very least a serious, scholarly and compelling start.

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Tomás Guzaro and Terri Jacob McComb, *Escaping the Fire: How an Ixil Mayan Pastor Led His People Out of the Holocaust during the Guatemalan Civil War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010), pp. xviii + 224, \$55.00, \$24.95 pb.

Depending upon your familiarity with Guatemalan history, there are two possible ways to read this book. I would suggest a linear path to those who already have a sense of Guatemala's conflict and an awareness of debates regarding *testimonio*. To those without this grounding I would recommend swerving to David Stoll's excellent afterword before commencing with the rest of the book. The book itself is an intriguing story, but one recounted in a way that will inherently polarise an audience with any kind of political opinion regarding the context. But this should not put off readers – the book contains a fascinating voice that throws light on a group who are often silenced within the literature on the civil war.

To an unaware audience, the story of Tomás Guzaro, a Mayan protestant evangelical pastor from the Ixil region, might seem like that of a rural Schindler leading 200 Mayas to freedom during the worst period of violence in the region. Guzaro's story is one that Terri Jacob McComb, an English teacher and missionary, had heard 'a dozen times' before she took it upon herself to turn it into a book. It is clear that in the telling and retelling the story has developed a rhetorical weight that serves Guzaro well in his pastoral role, with faith, divine intervention and triumph against adversity playing key roles in the narrative. The story of the escape is gripping, with Guzaro leading his flock to escape his guerrilla-occupied village past guerrilla patrols. It is recounted in a manner which emphasises the genuine risks they were exposed to, the fears they were feeling and the Stoll-like way in which they were caught between state and non-state armed actors acting with extreme hostility and unpredictability. Interlaced with this is Guzaro's life story, an emotional tale of a life shaped

by many deaths that lead him on a path to religious conversion and eventually the vision which inspires him to take action and escape the Ixil region.

The point at which my dissonance towards the book emerged came as early as the fifth page, when General Efraín Ríos Montt is held aloft as the saviour Guzaro is taking everybody towards. With Montt currently standing trial specifically for the genocide of Ixil Mayas, the awkwardness of this sentiment is a profound one. Allied with the distinct demonisation of guerrillas, there is a distinctly one-sided perspective that forces you to read between the lines. It is for this reason that I suggest the two distinct reading routes. With the book being written very accessibly and with an enticing religio-heroic narrative, it is clearly intended for a wide spectrum of readers. The omissions and one-sidedness of some recollections would have made me exceedingly reticent to recommend this book to those who were not anticipating the need to read between Guzaro's lines were it not for Stoll's intervention. In just 11 pages Stoll gives a near-perfect overview of *la violencia* while still leaving space to ground the specificity of experiences of Ixil Maya and to contextualise the book within the wider genre of testimonio – a genre he played such an active role in problematising in his critique of Menchu's autobiography. The book is almost worth buying for Stoll's contribution alone. But this is perhaps unfair on Guzaro, as the key point stressed by Stoll, with which I wholeheartedly concur, is that whether you agree or disagree with Guzaro's politics, his voice should be heard. Yes, the problematic tropes of testimonio are present here in a deliberately emotive narrative, selective remembering and the demonisation of 'the other' – in this case the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP). But what you are also shown is a largely coherent picture that demonstrates the logic behind some of the support that Ríos Montt has enjoyed for decades since he oversaw atrocities in Guatemala.

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Katherine Isbester (ed.), *The Paradox of Democracy in Latin America: Ten Country Studies of Division and Resilience* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. xv + 396, \$39.95, pb.

This book can be read both as a general introduction to Latin American politics and as a reflection on the condition of democracy in the region. Its focus is clearly set up in a rich and nuanced conceptual discussion of democracy in the first chapter. In this chapter, the author (the book's editor, Katherine Isbester) makes two important points that frame the subsequent historical analysis of the region's political systems: (1) democracy is not just a set of procedures but a system of government with an ethical content based on the principles of freedom, equality and justice; and (2) any analysis of democracy should focus on three core components: the state, civil society and the economy. While welcome, the incorporation of moral, institutional and socio-economic dimensions to the concept of democracy risks falling into a fuzzy conceptualisation of the term. However, Isbester's definition places her within the pluralist tradition, including pluralism's moral core: she defines democracy as 'a system that disperses power through its institutions and procedures so that the domination of one person, group, or interest can be kept to a minimum' (p. 2).

The conceptual discussion in the first chapter is followed by a second chapter on the political history of democracy in Latin America and by a third that surveys