



*Global Politics,
Cultural
Contentions,
and Moral
Engagements*

HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MAYA REGION

PEDRO PITARCH, SHANNON SPEED,
AND XOCHITL LEYVA SOLANO, EDITORS

In recent years Latin American indigenous groups have regularly deployed the discourse of human rights to legitimate their positions and pursue their goals. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the Maya region of Chiapas and Guatemala, where in the last two decades indigenous social movements have been engaged in ongoing negotiations with the state, and the presence of multinational actors has brought human rights to increased prominence. In this volume, scholars and activists examine the role of human rights in the ways that states relate to their populations, analyze conceptualizations and appropriations of human rights by Mayans in specific localities, and explore the relationship between the individualist and "universal" tenets of Western-derived concepts of human rights and various Mayan cultural understandings and political subjectivities.

"This is an important book. It brings together in one place state-of-the-art pieces by the scholars and scholar-activists who have made—and are making—the Maya area, especially Chiapas and Guatemala, one of the leading regions in the world for the theory and practice of indigenous human rights advocacy."—**Jan Rus III**, coeditor of *Mayan Lives, Mayan Utopias: The Indigenous Peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion*

"The notion of 'universal human rights' has had a checkered career over the past sixty years. Touted by some as one of the most effective tools for the empowerment and liberation of women and the poor in the so-called third world, it is denounced by others as a self-serving cultural imposition on the part of the Western world. *Human Rights in the Maya Region* takes us well beyond these extreme positions. By focusing on an exemplary case—the diverse experiences of the Mayan peoples of Chiapas and Guatemala—and never belittling the existing power asymmetries or the complexities of cultural translation, this coherent and well-grounded volume enlightens us on the multiple ways in which local groups make effective use of rights discourses on the basis of their distinct conceptions of persons and the world. At a more general level, the volume offers a nuanced and compelling explanation of the conjunctures of culture, rights, and power that are at play whenever 'rights' are deployed anywhere in the world. The volume will be of great value to those interested in human rights, indigenous peoples, social movements, traditional law, and the cultural-political dynamics of globalization."—**Arturo Escobar**, author of *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes*

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