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Reckoning: The Ends Of War In Guatemala



Synopsis

Following the 1996 treaty ending decades of civil war, how are Guatemalans reckoning with genocide, especially since almost everyone contributed in some way to the violence? Meaning âœto count, figure upâ • and âœto settle rewards and punishments,â • reckoning promises accounting and accountability. Yet as Diane M. Nelson shows, the means by which the war was waged, especially as they related to race and gender, unsettled the very premises of knowing and being. Symptomatic are the stories of duplicity pervasive in postwar Guatemala, as the left, the Mayan people, and the state were each said to have âœtwo faces.â • Drawing on more than twenty years of research in Guatemala, Nelson explores how postwar struggles to reckon with traumatic experience illuminate the assumptions of identity more generally. Nelson brings together stories of human rights activism, Mayan identity struggles, coerced participation in massacres, and popular entertainmentâ ”including traditional dances, horror films, and carnivalsâ ”with analyses of mass-grave exhumations, official apologies, and reparations. She discusses the stereotype of the Two-Faced Indian as colonial discourse revived by anti-guerrilla counterinsurgency and by the claims of duplicity leveled against the Nobel laureate Rigoberta MenchÃº, and she explores how duplicity may in turn function as a survival strategy for some. Nelson examines suspicions that state power is also two-faced, from the leftâ™s fears of a clandestine para-state behind the democratic facade, to the rightâ™s conviction that NGOs threaten Guatemalan sovereignty. Her comparison of antimalaria and antiradical campaigns suggests biopolitical ways that the state is two-faced, simultaneously giving and taking life. Reckoning is a view from the ground up of how Guatemalans are finding creative ways forward, turning ledger books, technoscience, and even gory horror movies into tools for making sense of violence, loss, and the future.

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Customer Reviews

this book is a major accomplishment that weaves cutting edge critical theory (on identity, memory, the state, and more) with in-depth ethnography in engaging prose. nelson interviews many prominent figures in guatemala and engages a wide range of postwar literature to directly confront the most difficult questions. not a ideal "first book" on guatemala, but a definite must read for anyone interested in the complexities of postwar guatemala, or post-conflict situations anywhere. highly recommend.

Diane M. Nelson has accomplished what many wish they could do: narrate in the first person while maintaining scientific objectivity. Her audacious attempt at weaving several themes and sub-themes from the start are beautifully accomplished through a narrative distilled to it's purest form: philosophy. The book may apparently have a narrow audience: most book buyer's may not be that interested in Guatemala. This is more the reason to commend the author's effort in producing such wonderful work. One word to those who are not the least bit interested in Guatemala: this book is tremendously insightful in human nature.

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