

## Book Review

Liza Grandia (2012), *Enclosed: Conservation, Cattle, and Commerce Among the Q'eqchi' Maya Lowlanders*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

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In *Enclosed: Conservation, Cattle, and Commerce Among the Q'eqchi' Maya Lowlanders*, Liza Grandia presents an interesting, rigorous, and useful history and ethnography of Guatemala's Q'eqchi' Mayans' repeated eviction from their settled lands over the last 400 years. However, though fascinating if taken as anthropology of "enclosure", Grandia's work is neither a successful work of political economy (to which it aspires) nor a successful investigation of the Q'eqchi's techniques of common pool resource management (to which it does not). These weaknesses aside, the work is a useful contribution to scholars' understanding of possible conflicts between private property rights and common pool resource management.

Grandia traces the history of several stages of Q'eqchi' migration from the Eastern highlands of Guatemala into the lowlands of the Petén region and into Belize. First pushed off their lands by conquistadors, they were later chased off by speculators, coffee barons, the United Fruit Company, wealthy landowners, the Guatemalan army and Guatemala's Marxist insurgency, and more recently, cattle ranchers and conservationists. Grandia argues that today's efforts to set aside Guatemala's lowlands as natural preserves, including the Maya Biosphere Preserve, are just the most recent reincarnation of these efforts to "enclose" Mayan agriculturalists. Although motives for the Q'eqchi's evictions have varied over time, they were often a result of efforts by elites to use the control of land to manipulate the labor supply and drive down the cost of labor. In essence, by controlling huge tracts of land, elites might reduce the number of independent small farmers, increase the number of wage laborers, and thereby reduce the cost of wage labor. In the end, therefore, controlling land might lead to greater profits in Guatemala's labor-intensive economy. Taken as an anthropological investigation

of this process, the work is a great success, comparing the Q'eqchi's repeated eviction as a process similar to the 17th century British enclosure process (hence the book's title). This comparison is deeply interesting, as political economists from Barrington Moore (Moore 1966) forward have traced the industrial revolution to this process in the UK, and the subsequent accumulation of capital by a wealthy upper-class.

Although *Enclosed* theorizes about the general causes of the Q'eqchi's plight, Grandia's political economic explanation is not convincing. Grandia relies on obsolete Marxist and Dependency dogma, casting "neoliberal" organizations as villains. Unfortunately, however, these assertions are not supported with clear, falsifiable hypotheses, nor any effort at rigorous hypothesis testing. Doubtless, some significant portion of the Q'eqchi's problems can be traced to market forces and so-called "neoliberalism", but scholars have presented many equally likely and possibly more important explanations. In Grandia's work, an interesting opportunity to test these ideas is lost – she dwells at length on the differences between Q'eqchi' Maya who migrated into Belize as early as the 19th century and those Q'eqchi' remaining in Guatemala. The differences between these groups' situations seem ripe for systematic case comparisons, but such comparisons are never made. For example, it seems unlikely that the Belize Q'eqchi' are less exposed to market forces than those in Guatemala, (which is what Grandia's theoretical approach would seem to suggest) but there may be other important differences, including internal differences between Q'eqchi' groups, differences between national legal systems, state capacity, and the rule of law.

Unfortunately for commons scholars, the work does not describe in detail the Q'eqchi's rules, norms, and scripts of commons management, instead assuming that communally managed property is generally better managed than property managed using Anglo-European style private property rights, or by central government management. Indeed, Grandia paints a misleading picture of the the literature on commons management, citing Garrett Hardin and Elinor Ostrom (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 1990), but arguing that communally held and managed lands are almost always managed more effectively than private property or property managed by a central government authority (p. 17). This assertion is not consistent with the work of Ostrom and her colleagues, who have long argued that, while common property management can be made to work under certain conditions, it is often unsuccessful. Ostrom and like-minded scholars have built a large, well-developed research program attempting to identify the factors that make these systems more effective (Ostrom 1999; 2007).

Therefore, the book is best read as a work of ethnography focusing on the history and micro-level impacts on eviction and enclosure. Despite its weaknesses, Grandia's insightful discussion of the conflicts between different types of property rights, the use of land as a tool for labor force manipulation, and the continuing plight of the Maya make the book worth the time of scholars of common property and common pool resource management.

### Literature cited

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