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The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico

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My only criticism is that their introductory discussions fail to transcend description, and they provide no needed analytic or synthetic conclusions. What was the situation in seventeenth-century New Spain for Nahua scholars and how does Chimalpahin exemplify it? What does Chimalpahin's reticence to defend the Nahua say about identity politics of the day? What does Chimalpahin's work tell us about the nature of post-conquest society in New Spain? In neglecting these and many additional questions, the editors miss the opportunity to show how Chimalpahin's corrections of López de Gómara's history illuminates the context in which he lived and worked.

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The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico

DAVID TAVÁREZ

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011

xii, 384 pp. (ISBN: 9780804773287)

David Tavárez renders *The Invisible War* in such incredible detail that it is difficult to conceive of this as his first book. It reads more like a life's work: comprehensive, yet careful; formidable, but rewarding; and engrossing while exact(ing). Each sentence demands the reader's full attention because it presents so much information about specific people, particular circumstances, and the precise interplay of devotional activities, disciplinary measures, and dissent.

In the book's final pages, Tavárez describes the sort of dissent engaged in by locals subject to ecclesiastical oversight as 'what James Scott famously termed "everyday forms of resistance"' (276). This characterization merits mention because as with instances of everyday resistance—a social force that functions under the proverbial radar—the power of subtlety resonates throughout Tavárez's text. Not only does he describe discrete instances of ritual practices that attracted extirpators' attention in such a meticulous fashion that the reader feels like she meets each example in its everyday context (rather than reified to suit the scholar's argument), but Tavárez's own brand of resistance, whether to 'syncretism' or Foucault, also strikes one as forceful but subdued. In short, the author crafts an incredible journey through the devotional lives of sixteenth- through eighteenth-century Nahua and Zapotec communities.

Tavárez helpfully provides a summary of the book's chapters (24–25), and so, rather than reiterate in detail what he examines, I will touch on two of the book's contributions to the fields with which it intersects (Mesoamerican studies, colonial studies, anthropology, religious studies, and history). First, as part of his critique of 'syncretism' and 'hybridity'—and he explains that their 'mere use never constitutes a

full analysis' (271)—Tavárez offers the alternative organizational principles of the 'communal' and 'elective' spheres. Tavárez admits that Zapotec descriptions of communal and personal rituals inspired the categories. He distinguishes his work from that of other scholars by explaining that these designations acknowledge that 'the communal and private levels were vertically integrated with large-scale theories about the cosmological order and that both intimate and public Nahua and Zapotec devotions were, in fact, oriented toward understanding, propitiating, or even manipulating important entities in the cosmos' (10). His examination of *nahualtocaitl*, Nahuatl names, in chapter three illustrates elective and communal collaborations with cosmological significance. Drawing on his impressive knowledge of Nahuatl (as he does elsewhere with Zapotec), Tavárez leads the reader to an understanding of the roles the *nahualtocaitl* play in deity invocations in both spheres (77–80). Ultimately, 'elective' and 'communal' draw our attention to the agency devotees exercised when they opted into (or out of) ritual activities while avoiding relegating anyone or any practice to the public or private domain.

Second, Tavárez provides an exemplary and exceptionally well-researched history of local religious practices and conflicts. Studies of Mesoamerica and colonial Mexico typically focus on major urban centers, and he admits that his book depends upon records left by the institutions that targeted the devotions he studies, thus omitting traditional practices that were neglected by ecclesiastics. Nonetheless, *The Invisible War* adds detail and distinction to specifically identified local traditions. Tavárez realizes this, and frequently calls the reader's attention to his 'microsociological' analysis (193, 271), an approach that (again) counters the assumptions embedded in 'syncretism' and similar terms. He takes this tactic throughout the book, but principally in chapter seven, which he devotes to Zapotec ancestor veneration. There the approach produces for the reader a sense of distinctively Zapotec ritual practices and reactions. More than that, though, the approach offers examples—such as rhetorically emasculating men who refuse to safeguard their ancestors—that take us into the particulars of devotion, discipline, and dissent.

The detailed nature of Tavárez's text along with his command of a range of subjects, variety of languages, and historical depth make it an intense read. Rewarding—as I noted—but at times laborious. On one hand, his microanalyses give us access to texts, people(s), and places that we would not have otherwise; yet, on the other hand, we learn so much about each of them that it is at times difficult to position them in the overall picture. Perhaps that is the point of microsociology: the annoying intimacy of minutiae forcefully draws us away from the temptations of syncretism and synthesis. Regardless, Tavárez's book is an achievement in its accuracy, analysis, and approach.

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