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New World, First Nations: Native Peoples of Mesoamerica and the Andes under Colonial Rule. David Cahill and Blanca Tovías, eds. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2006.

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The native peoples of the Americas have proved an endless fascination for scholars. In this new volume, editors David Cahill and Blanca Tovías present ten essays of recent ethnohistorical research. Five focus on Andean society; three deal with the Maya regions of Chiapas and Yucatán; and two explore central Mexico. While these selections outline a number of the new currents and discoveries regarding said cultures, they also document the extraordinary longevity of some very old controversies.

Collected essays almost always present a grab bag of method and perspective, and *New World* is no exception. But some consistent themes do emerge, and one concerns the situation of native peoples within larger colonial currents. As recently as twenty years ago many hewed the line of cultural essentialism, which posited inherent cultural attributes persisting in spite of historical change. The native peoples here clearly act upon their circumstances, and in turn change in according with circumstances. Rather than standing apart from Spanish colonials, natives probed the colonial world for cracks and weaknesses. Chiapas often serves as Mexico's poster child for ethnic polarization, but even in the heartlands region of Soconusco, Janine Gasco traces Indian identity as fluctuating over time. Subject peoples changed Indian languages over time (as Nahaut partially displaced earlier tongues), and people often preferred to call themselves non-Indian to avoid tribute burdens. Even cultural hallmarks as fundamentally European as the book had their Mesoamerican counterparts, and Susan Schroeder's essay documents how the book featured in Nahua society both before and after the conquest.

One interpretive divide (though never directly framed in the book) concerns human motivation: did indigenous culture fundamentally reflect material concerns, or did religious ideology somehow provide the shaping force behind their culture? While most of the collaborations explore themes of land, wealth, and the ceaseless human quest for prestige, Susan Ramírez sees the *kurakas* (Andean village headmen) as drawing their authority from their presumed ability to mediate supernatural forces. The question of whether humans make ideas or ideas make humans is not likely to disappear soon, and doubtless for the best, for the tension the question generates pushes us to further inquiry.

A second split of interpretation concerns the overall nature of colonial society. Accommodating? Extractive? Better said, what puzzles us is how Spanish colonialism managed to be inclusive and exploitative at the same time. Much of the leeway came unintentionally, since there were simply too few Spaniards in the Americas to pull out the taproots of native society. Nor did Spaniards necessarily incline to do so. They subscribed too deeply to concepts of hierarchy to disrecognize the native nobles altogether. Hence, Andean *señores* survived in the renegade community of Vilcabamba, spared conquest in part because a whole generation of conquistadors weakened themselves through internecine power struggles and even rebellion against the crown itself. As Kertstin Nowack shows, Vilcabamba spent more time interfering in quarrels with rival Indian polities than in plaguing the Spanish. But even in the very heart of colonial Peruvian society, Inca elites managed to carve out some autonomous space for themselves as electors in an institution known as the *alférez real*, never clearly defined but clearly a watering hole for would-be heirs to the glory of Atahualpa. Numbers indicate how clearly they succeeded: Cahill suggests a total of some 800-1,000 Andean nobles in the city of Cuzco alone. But new light shines only so far, and many of the dark injustices of colonialism cannot be explained away. Kevin Gosner specifically attacks revisionist history of *repartimiento*, the old practice of forcing natives to purchase undesired items.

The pieces in this edition vary in both quality and clarity. I find Elsa Malvido's essay on "Avatars of Death" among Yucatec Maya rather mystifying. The source material (including motion pictures, studies of the European black plague, colonial Yucatecan chronicles, and a patina of primary sources) is so far flung that the work fails to achieve coherent substance. Luis Miguel Glave's study of Peruvian independence could use a more sharply defined thesis,

and (curious for an ethnohistory anthology) hews too closely to creole political history. Eric Van Young's closing piece, "A National Movement without Nationalism", offers yet another splinter of his *The Other Rebellion*, and hence fails to surprise. With some notable exceptions, the bulk of contributions here concern the Incas both before and after 1532, and for that reason *New World, First Nations* is perhaps best read as a signpost to future Andean ethnohistory.

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