comparison by region and across time. It can be concluded that there was a certain practicality to all of this testamentary activity, which thus affords the best of all possible information about Nahua life. We can only be grateful that Pizzigoni has taken on the task of translating and commenting on these hundreds of wills, which guarantees one of the most intensive and complete studies of Nahua life anywhere in colonial Mesoamerica.

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Claudio Lomnitz, *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), pp. 581, £21.95, hb.

Octavio Paz once observed – introducing a similarly ambitious cultural history – that Mexicans only believed in the National Lottery and the Virgen de Guadalupe. Claudio Lomnitz would disagree and put death at the top of the list. His study of 'The Most Powerful Empress of the Graves …, the Inexorable Fate that has its Court and Palace in the Subterranean Vaults of that Sad and Fearful Region of Darkness' does not aim to provide arabesques to the seminal work of Philippe Ariès or Michel Vovelle. Lomnitz instead explores five centuries of death in Mexico armed with four differentiating assumptions. There is, he posits, far less of a single, great tradition of death in Mexico than in Europe. Whereas the idea of death was denied by the twentieth-century cultures of Europe and the United States, it was ostentatiously embraced in Mexico. This polysemic, cross-class celebration made death 'the nation's tutelary sign', after a centuries-long process in which 'political control over dying, the dead, and the representation of the dead and the afterlife has been key to the formation of the modern state, images of popular culture, and a properly national modernity' (p. 483). Lomnitz, in short, is not out to write *The Hour of Our Death 2: The Mexican Case*. He is explicitly on a bigger quest: to reconstruct attitudes to death over the *longue durée*, and to demonstrate how these attitudes lie at the core of being Mexican.

The work is organised in five sections. A lengthy introduction argues for the centrality of death to modern Mexican identity before giving way to four chapters on death and the origins of the colonial state; three chapters examining death and the origins of popular culture; and another four chapters linking death, politics and national identity in post-independence Mexico. The conclusion, which modishly eschews concluding much, centres on La Santa Muerte: a recent cult, popular among criminals and policemen, to an iconographically adventurous blend of the Virgin Mary and the Grim Reaper.

These are sweeping and dramatic subjects, and Lomnitz opens in sweeping and dramatic tone amid the 'great dying' of the conquest. Having emphasised the sheer scale of the mortality with (misleading) references to Auschwitz and the 'holocaust of the sixteenth century', Lomnitz moves on to the fundamental role of death in state formation. This is treated in political terms, through the basic mission of colonial statecraft, 'an effort to rein in the destruction of the Indies', and within a cultural framework. The latter posits a sense of imminent apocalypse as critical to early colonial state formation. In this scheme, the conquistadores were represented as the instruments of punishment of the indigenous idolaters, while the Franciscans played the source of their redemption. Indians, through works such as the 1531

Nahuatl play, *The Final Judgement*, were terrified into mass conversion to avoid the onrushing mass descent into hell. Thus the Christian introduction of, loss of control over, and eschatological interpretation of massive death among the Indians underpinned both material and cultural domination in New Spain. The Hapsburgs, as David Brading noted, did indeed rule by priest.

These processes also perpetuated, Lomnitz argues, the rift between European and Indian concepts and practices of death. While the Spaniards devoted considerable energy to the theological escape hatch of purgatory, their new indigenous subjects were offered a minimalist Christianity centring on the fundamental sacraments: baptism and marriage. The lack of a single indigenous treatment for the dead – the Aztecs cremated, the Zapotecs buried – added further diversity to the traditions of death in New Spain. Meanwhile the friars, backed by the low expectations of their Provincial Councils, managed a *modus vivendi* in which Indians kept less overtly prehispanic rituals for their dead – drinking, dancing and feasting – but largely abandoned human sacrifice, cremation and home burials. Once again, the practices of death were deeply politicised. Spaniards could enjoy elaborate public celebrations of the Days of the Dead while Indians could not, a difference that reinforced the superiority of the former as better Christians. As the colony matured so did the instrumental uses of death; by the late sixteenth century churchmen were preaching the doctrine of purgatory among Indians, boosting their revenues with the ensuing legacies and purchased masses. Thus purgatory catalysed the spread of private property, taxation and early capitalism.

Such a marked cultural shift, from apocalyptic to accountancy-based understandings of death, was made possible by the end of the 'great dying' and the stabilisation of the colonial state. With it came reliable everyday domination by the Church. As the majority of colonial humanity found themselves on the path to purgatory, religious mechanisms to reduce sentences there became society's central preoccupation. Some of those mechanisms – *cofradías*, closer patron-client relations – prompted a sense of community. Others promoted a sense of class identity, as the rich had more names, more masses, and more elaborate funerals. Baroque culture emerged out of the imperative to collaborate and compete for escape from purgatory; and out of the expense of the church ritual at its heart came the popular appropriation (and indigenous embellishment) of the death cult. This was, Lomnitz persuasively concludes, 'a popular culture built at every point on the domestication and popularization of the death cult, with its elaborate and plentiful saints' feasts, its concern with funerary pomp and charity, its corporations' savings and efforts geared to funerary expenditure, its village lands identified with village saints, and its vision of justice projected onto the afterlife' (p. 261).

Early missionaries would have swapped their scapulars for such profound Christianisation; but by the late eighteenth century bishops and civic reformers alike were attacking baroque religious practice. Other historians have interpreted this as the beginning of a marked divorce between a Europeanised elite, beginning to deny death, and the popular culture of a *México profundo* intimate with death; Lomnitz is sensibly sceptical of such a grand schema. His principal explanation for the endurance of the Days of the Dead is political: an impoverished state needed the rents it charged stallholders in the accompanying markets, and was too weak to repress the entire event by force. As a result the assault on the macabre was more rhetorical than practical, and disseminated yet further the imagery, rituals and language of the baroque cult of death. By the Porfiriato, the gentrification of the Days of the Dead

and the state's fascination with dead heroes were all signs, Lomnitz believes, of the hold of a macabre popular culture over the diverse shapers of national identity, from ministers to market vendors; a death grip only tightened by the Revolution.

Any treatment of culture over a very long period of time is invariably open to charges of impressionism. Ariès was accused of reconstructing man's changing vision of the Last Judgement from a seventh-century tomb, some twelfth- and thirteenth-century tympani, and a fifteenth-century fresco; he himself cheerfully admitted to applying an 'intuitive and subjective' approach to a 'chaotic mass of documents'. Lomnitz's complex arguments are likewise based on wide-ranging and eclectic research. The first two – broadly 'death underpins the colonial state' and 'death creates popular and religious culture' – will be influential both for their persuasive analyses and their compendia of evidence. Yet, just as Mexico disintegrates in revolution so too does Lomnitz's third and final argument. The closing chapters weave between the adoption of death as a political idiom by governments, opposition and artists; the traditional weakness of the state; the Revolution as a 'war of national liberation'; the rise of Halloween at the expense of the Days of the Dead; the rejection of death by the *generación de la onda*; and the deconstruction of death in Mexico by post-revolutionary intellectuals. As the line of argument becomes obscure so too does the language, resorting to 'lifeworlds', 'ethnoscapes', 'ideascapes', and that catch-all abstraction, 'modernity'. Lomnitz is too scrupulous a scholar not to admit serious counter-arguments; and in so doing he does not convincingly demonstrate his original postulate, that death endures as a master-symbol of *lo mexicano*. What will endure is an excellent interpretation of the emergence of popular culture in Mexico; wrapped in a book which shares some of the intellectual fireworks of Paz and – despite introductory distancing – more than a little of what Lomnitz calls 'that wonderful rambling quality' of his *annaliste* predecessors.

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Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (eds.), *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. x + 321, £60.00, £14.95, pb.

This long awaited volume exceeds all expectations, advancing simultaneously the field of gender history, our understanding of modern Mexico, and its place in twentieth century global history. The book's most significant contributions fall into three broad categories. First and most importantly, it places gender, particularly Mexicans' inability to resolve contradictions about gender, at the centre of the historical narrative. In the process, it illustrates convincingly how it is not possible truly to understand events without doing so. Second, the volume broadens the scope of our understanding of the post-revolutionary period beyond urban, middle-class supporters of the regime in power to include rural, lower-class and indigenous individuals, as well as opponents of the government. It begins to address the integration of race/ethnicity, gender and class into a workable theoretical model. Third, the authors tie the particular to the general, incorporating the value of microhistory without ignoring the need for constructing meaningful national and global historical narratives.

Temma Kaplan states that 'Patriarchy serves as a model for all hierarchical systems.' Thus, as Mary Kay Vaughan points out, recent scholarship has revealed