## EVANGELIZATION IN COLONIAL MEXICO

*Tongues of Fire: Language and Evangelization in Colonial Mexico*. By Nancy Farriss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxi, 409, Glossary. Notes. Bibliography, Index. $99.00 cloth.
doi:10.1017/tam.2020.12

With this book, Nancy Farriss provides the kind of magnum opus social history that has gone in and out of fashion as various other subgenres have come and gone. But the basic unit of such high-quality social history has always been deeply researched investigation. This book does not disappoint.

Students of Mexican history, ethnohistory, and evangelization will find much to enjoy in this study; historians of language may find themselves split in their assessment of *Tongues of Fire*. The title itself is a play on the idea of the Pentecost, when tongues of fire, taken to be physical ardor of the Holy Spirit, landed on the tops of the heads of the apostles. This moment of the Pentecost also was a moment when, miraculously, everyone could understand other languages, even as they realized it was only a miracle that allowed them such comprehension. In keeping with the theme of language and its relationship to (Christian) salvation, Farriss argues that "translation in its largest sense was the engine of syncretism" (6). Her study takes Oaxaca as a microcosm of colonial Mexican society, wherein European missionaries attempted to translate Catholic doctrine and ideas into indigenous languages. For Farriss, "[t]he major legacy of this exchange is the thoroughly blended, uniquely Mexican form of Christianity that has survived and continues to remake itself to the present" (7). She thus appears to reject the assessment that indigenous and Spanish Catholic religious practices and cosmologies existed in parallel, not in concert.

The book offers a nuanced and richly researched work of scholarship. Each chapter reads like a self-contained essay of reflection touching on a variety of themes related to much broader questions about language vis-à-vis evangelization. Oaxaca makes for an especially rich case study, given its exceptionally high degree of ethnolinguistic variation and diversity. The breadth of analysis really makes this book stand out, even if it does not provide a microscopic analysis of indigenous languages per se.

The book is divided into four sections, each composed of two or three chapters. Part I examines "language contact and language policy." Here we see the very earliest projects and attitudes concerning indigenous language approaches, especially those of the Dominicans, who dominated Oaxaca's missionary enterprise. There is, in general, a paucity of deeply researched studies of the early sixteenth century in Mexico among US historians. Some of this is certainly due to the difficulty of the paleography. Farriss does an admirable job of piecing together a wide-ranging and diverse archival landscape to provide highly readable chapters about hand signs, interpreters, and language diversity.

Chapter 2, on interpreters, offers a finely woven discussion of the everyday nature of interpreters—both formal *nahuatlatos* (interpreters) as well as informal ones. She makes two important observations. One, interpreters lived a life in between, in *nepantla*, trusted neither by their original indigenous community (in the case of indigenous nahuatlatos) nor by the Spaniards they served. Second, she shows that indigenous nahuatlatos often served as "surrogate or deputy missionaries" (39), given the low numbers of missionaries in relation to the large rural populations. In Chapter 3, Farriss outlines the bewildering diversity of languages in Oaxaca and the ways that the introduction of Nahuatl as a lingua franca affected translation efforts. In many cases, a two-part chain translation was necessary, rendering literal translations virtually impossible.

Part II tackles the issues of evangelization in vernacular languages. The issue concerned European priests as well, since by 1554 vernacular translations of Scripture were banned by the Spanish Inquisition. Farriss reiterates what has become common knowledge: that friars relied heavily on native scribes and language experts to produce their own indigenous language primers, *doctrinas*, and quasi-ethnographic observations. Chapter 5 offers a particularly intriguing discussion of the problems of language in the process of preaching and evangelizing, in the most everyday sense. The production of grammars and *artes* in native languages was intended to help missionaries and parish priests in their duties of administering sacraments to the indigenous population.

Farriss asks a key question: "To what extent were the preachers able to speak well enough to convey the message of Christianity in their sermons?" (126) The answer is not clear because so few ordinary sermons are extant and it is impossible to reproduce oral speech from the period. Farriss notes that we must "assume that the majority of peninsular priests spoke indigenous languages imperfectly" (133). This seems logical enough, but the extent of this is unclear. The best argument for this is that there are so many instances in which priests had to rely on translators in the confessional, even to understand the confession. Such an adaptation violated the secrecy of the confessional, so it seems logical that Spanish priests' mastery of languages like Mixtec and Zapotec was poor. But this does not rule out the possibility of some priests obtaining such mastery.

Part III analyzes the "means and the message" of evangelization. As was the case in Tenochtitlan and Michoacán, Farriss shows that it was the elite indigenous (*pipiltin*) of Oaxaca who most supported and aided the evangelization program. Farriss calls these pipiltin the "noncommissioned officers in the spiritual conquest." At first glance, such a statement may suggest that Farriss relies on a rather old-school, Ricard-inspired belief in a spiritual conquest. But she also concludes that while the role of indigenous elites in that project was "essential," the form of Catholicism in Mexico inevitably bore the "unmistakable stamp of their own indigenous culture" (144).

Adding to recent studies on indigenous intellectuals (such as those by Mark Christensen, Gabriela Ramos, Yanna Yannakakis, and David Tavárez), Farris's new book provides an engaging overview of the ways that "indigenous literati" provided the everyday,

https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2020.12 Published online by Cambridge University Press

meat-and-potato ministering of Catholicism in their parishes in their roles as mayordomos, *lenguas*, *maestros de doctrina*, and bandleaders. Because they could explain ideas in indigenous languages in ways the Spanish priests could not, the form Catholicism took in Oaxaca was inevitably quite indigenous. Farriss does not seem to take much stock in the possibility that both elite and *macehual* (commoner) indigenous hid their own religious ceremonies and cosmologies from the friars; Tavárez's work on extirpation campaigns, for example, suggests otherwise. In Chapter 7, "The Word of God," Farriss also makes the important point that the friars did not expect the macehual population to learn much of Catholic doctrine beyond memorizing basic prayers. Such an admission does not square necessarily with language about the spiritual conquest, since such a status suggests no spiritual conquest. Part IV provides fine-grained assessments of questions about linguistic meaning, persuasion, and the extent of Catholic cosmology. Chapter 8 shows how thoroughly friars depended on elite indigenous collaborators in their production of primers and doctrinas. But here, and in chapters 9 and 10, we find some of the book's more theoretical discussions, about the dilemma of "equivalence" between Spanish and indigenous languages for important Catholic concept-words like *sacramento* or *bautismo*. Likewise, how did friars and indigenous make sense of concepts like hell or the Trinity? Language added to the confusion. Farriss thus adds to our expanding understanding of the roles of indigenous witnesses, scribes, and interpreters, and shows that they provided most of the material for indigenous language doctrinal production even if their names did not appear as authors.

This book is a nuanced, sophisticated, and deeply researched study. It represents a carefully considered panorama of debates about language in colonial society as it relates to religion. But it is about more than religion per se. The book shows the reader how careful attention to a very wide range of archival research produces a book subtle in its conclusions. For this reader, at least, it was the kind of enjoyable read that showcases the histories of ordinary people and at the same time avoids ornate theories to explain colonialism.

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## BAHIA AND BRAZILIAN INDEPENDENCE

*Bahia's Independence: Popular Politics and Patriotic Festival in Salvador, Brazil, 1824–1900*. By Hendrik Kraay. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. Pp. xiv, 416. Map. Tables. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $120.00 cloth; $39.95 paper. doi:10.1017/tam.2020.13

On July 2, 1823, Portuguese forces retreated from Salvador da Bahia in northeastern Brazil, as a patriot army, mobilized to defend a declaration of independence from