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## PERFORMANCE IN THE ZÓCALO: CONSTRUCTING HISTORY, RACE, AND INDENTITY IN MEXICO'S CENTRAL SQUARE FROM THE COLONIAL ERA TO THE PRESENT. Ana Martínez. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020; Pp. 222

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In recent years, our understanding of the deep complexities of race and power in early colonial Mexico has been advanced greatly by scholars treating the era from a range of interdisciplinary approaches. Many works have taken up performance as a primary analytical lens, including Linda A. Curcio-Nagy's *The Great Festivals of Colonial Mexico City* (2004), Patricia Ybarra's *Performing Conquest* (2009), Paul A. Scolieri's *Dancing the New World* (2013), and Leo Cabranes-Grant's *From Scenarios to Networks* (2016). Ana Martínez's 2020 *Performance in the Zócalo* expands the discourse in important new directions. The author's architectural and scenographic expertise brings spatial considerations to the fore in fresh new ways, a perspective heightened by the book's diachronic analysis of a single space (Mexico City's central Plaza de la Constitución, popularly known as the Zócalo) over time, from the sixteenth century through the twenty-first.

Martínez's unique approach is to "study urban spaces through embodied practices across time" (5). To manage such study over a span of more than five centuries, she carefully selects a handful of key events staged in Mexico City's main square from the colonial period through the Porfiriato and into the twenty-first century. Martínez further frames her analysis by choosing case studies that foreground the agency of Indigenous participants, a move that not only resists foundational and ongoing erasure of Native Mexican identity and history, but also provides a basis for her central thesis that the space and flows of the Zócalo have always served as a "site of officialdom and liberation" (5). Martínez's particular interdisciplinary methodology takes advantage of the "overlapping areas of performance studies, Mexican studies, and urban studies" (11), borrowing equally from the insights of scenographers, sociologists, and critical geographers.

Each of the five chapters begins with a thorough contextualization of a particular historical spectacle, including a spatial description of the plaza at the time of the performance. Analysis then progresses through a thick description of the event, setting up a theorized exploration of its social meaning(s). The first chapter is a study of a civic festival mounted in the square and surrounding streets in 1539, less than two decades after Cortés's destruction of the Mexican capital of Tenochtitlán. Martínez interprets the festival— a four-day jumble of mock battles, athletic competitions, and public banquets—as a Spanish/Indigenous collaboration, intended by the former as a celebration of the newly-constructed colonial center, and seized upon by the latter as an opportunity to perpetuate pre-conquest forms of cultural expression. Notable here is Martínez's use of contemporary maps, both Spanish and Native. With Chapter Two, the author treats the 1721 *Paseo del pendón* (parade of the royal banner), by which viceregal authorities attempted to appropriate a nearly two century-old local celebration for the purposes of strengthening imperial ideology. As Martínez shows, the compulsion of Native participation by colonial officials unintentionally created a space for Indigenous artists to reassert the place of their communities into the imagining of Mexican identity. Here the author makes excellent use of contemporary paintings in arguing her point. Chapter Three takes us into the twentieth century, and the centennial commemoration of Mexican independence staged in the Zócalo by President Porfirio Díaz in 1910. Mounted just a few short months before the outbreak of the Revolution, one might expect the celebrations to have represented the final gasp of Mexican authoritarianism. Instead, Martínez argues that these spectacles (including the first delivery of the *grito* from the balcony of the National Palace) cemented the Zócalo as the premier space for performing Mexican identity, and (particularly in the case of the *Gran desfile histórico*) solidified a narrative of past Indigenous glory and current Native absence that continues to haunt Mexican popular historiography today.

Having established the centrality of the Zócalo as Mexico's commemorative center, Martínez shares with the next chapter an example of liberatory counter-performance in the plaza: the 2001 Zapatista march on Mexico City. Quoting movement leaders such as Comandanta Esther, the author brings the spoken words of Indigenous agents directly into her narrative. With the final two chapters of the book, Martínez effectively contrasts twenty-first century performances that underline her thesis regarding the Zócalo as a space for performing both officialdom and liberation. First, she critiques President Felipe Calderón's use of the 2010 bicentennial celebrations to boost support for his unpopular administration, spotlighting the participation of notable Mexican theatre artists otherwise known for their criticism of governmental authority.

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Martínez also notes the parallels between the historical parades of 1910 and 2010, with respect to both the appropriation of Native culture and the exploitation of Indigenous performers. With the final case study, Martínez treats the 2018 inauguration of President López Obrador, during which he symbolically received the *Bastón de mando* (baton to lead) from Indigenous leaders. She focuses on the potential of AMLO's recognition of Native sovereignty, while expressing the reservations shared by many regarding the new administration's commitment to Indigenous rights.

Scholarship on historical performance in the Americas will benefit greatly from the architectural and urban studies lenses that Martínez brings to her analysis. Her attention to the historical relationship between Mexico's Indigenous peoples and its successive governments furthers the understanding of all interested in that aspect of Mexican society and history. Methodologically, the book represents an excellent example of transhistorical curation of case studies, enabling a chronically wide-ranging argument by limiting focus to a single, highly symbolic performance space. The structure also serves the book's usefulness as a teaching tool, in that it can be assigned in its entirety, or broken into chapters to serve the needs of any number of discipline-specific seminars. With this work, Martínez has made significant contributions to both Mexican history and to our understanding of how sociopolitical power circulates through performance

## References

Martínez, Anna. *Performance in the Zócalo: Constructing History, Race, and Identity in Mexico's Central Square from the Colonial Era to the Present*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020.

## About The Authors

Andrew Gibb is Graduate Advisor and Co-Area Head for Theatre History, Theory, and Criticism in the School of Theatre and Dance at Texas Tech University. He is the author of *Californios, Anglos, and the Performance of Oligarchy in the U.S. West* (Southern Illinois UP, 2018), and has published work in *Theatre History Studies*, *New England Theatre Journal*, *Latin American Theatre Review*, *Theatre Symposium*, and *Texas Theatre Journal*.

Dr. Gibb is a past editor of *Theatre Symposium: A Publication of the Southeastern Theatre Conference*, and has served as the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's Vice President for Conference, as well as the Pedagogy Symposium Co-Chair for the Mid-America Theatre Conference. Dr. Gibb was awarded the Ph.D. in Theatre Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the M.F.A. in Acting from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

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