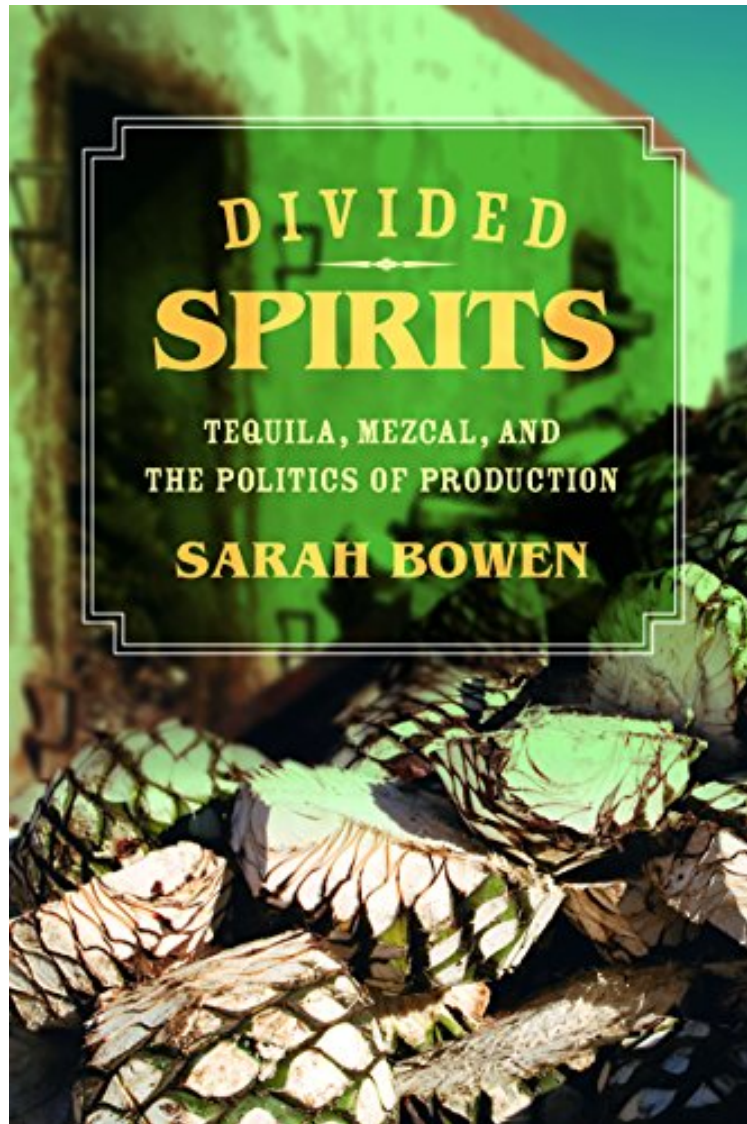


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## Divided Spirits: Tequila, Mezcal, and the Politics of Production (California Studies in Food and Culture)

*Sarah Bowen*

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**Sarah Bowen : Divided Spirits: Tequila, Mezcal, and the Politics of Production (California Studies in Food and Culture)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Divided Spirits: Tequila, Mezcal, and the Politics of Production (California Studies in Food and Culture):

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Divided Spirits Delivers On Its Promise By John McEvoy Divided Spirits delivers on its promise: it is an in-depth look at the history, practices, and politics of tequila and mezcal

production. As the author is a professor, this is largely an academic take with extensive and deep research over a ten year period. The author has interviewed many participants in the supply chain of agave spirits from the farmers to the producers to the retailers and bartenders. Among many things she goes into detail on denominations of origin (DO), what they mean, and what their potential value is. Then she dives into the history of mezcal and later tequila (which is a mezcal as many know). The sections on tequila are pretty much a take down of the big industrial tequila producers - how they abuse the farmers who grow the agave and exploit the DO to the point that it has really detached from its original intention. The interviews with the farmers and laborers gets a bit lengthy and tedious and her points could be made more succinctly, but it reflects an extensive amount of knowledge and she has a lot to communicate. Having written a book on mezcal, I really enjoyed the mezcal section (surprise!) and it all rings true to me. She does a great job discussing the mezcal DO and the associated issues, including agave sustainability, the profound historical culture of mezcal, the economic issues for producers, the appalling attempts to change the DO in favor of the industrial producers, and many more things. About the only thing I did not like is her ongoing reluctance to give the reader obvious information that you are inclined to ask as you are reading the book. For example, she has numerous quotes from the "artist" founder of Del Maguey, but fails to name him (it is Ron Cooper!). Why not tell us? Or she will give you someone's name and say he is "an owner of a high-end tequila brand", but does not tell me which brand? She talks about an agave spirits cocktail bar in NYC's East Village that was named cocktail bar of the year, but she does not give you the name of the bar (it's Mayahuel). There are numerous other examples of this style. Why Sarah, why??? I don't get it. While those issues frustrated me, it did not bring down my overall experience. It is well written, well researched, has a pointed perspective, and full of information. I enjoyed it. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. To be savored, not shot By Too Too Much What a smart, well-researched book! Thank you, Ms Bowen, for letting us look inside the bottle to understand what this spirit means to people. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Amanda R Birman The book was absolutely amazing!! Professor Bowen did an amazing job!

Divided Spirits tells the stories of tequila and mezcal, two of Mexico's most iconic products. In doing so, the book illustrates how neoliberalism influences the production, branding, and regulation of local foods and drinks. It also challenges the strategy of relying on "alternative" markets to protect food cultures and rural livelihoods. In recent years, as consumers increasingly demand to connect with the people and places that produce their food, the concept of terroir—the taste of place—has become more and more prominent. Tequila and mezcal are both protected by denominations of origin (DOs), legal designations that aim to guarantee a product's authenticity based on its link to terroir. Advocates argue that the DOs expand market opportunities, protect cultural heritage, and ensure the reputation of Mexico's national spirits. Yet this book shows how the institutions that are supposed to guard "the legacy of all Mexicans" often fail those who are most in need of protection: the small producers, agave farmers, and other workers who have been making tequila and mezcal for generations. The consequences—for the quality and taste of tequila and mezcal, and for communities throughout Mexico—are stark. Divided Spirits suggests that we must move beyond market-based models if we want to safeguard local products and the people who make them. Instead, we need systems of production, consumption, and oversight that are more democratic, more inclusive, and more participatory. Lasting change is unlikely without the involvement of the state and a sustained commitment to addressing inequality and supporting rural development.

"There is not much published about the two iconic Mexican spirits, except for consumer books and tasting guides to different brands. Bowen's perspective is fresh and thought-provoking."