Choice, Persuasion, and Coercion

Social Control on Spain's North American Frontiers

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In May of 1691, a mulatta slave from Durango made a startling confession to a Jesuit priest in Parral, Chihuahua. For more than six years, Antonia de Soto had traversed much of New Spain’s north central region (Nueva Vizcaya) while masquerading as a man. Her fantastic tale had all the elements of a swashbuckling adventure: travel, riches, derring-do, masculine prowess, murder, and mayhem. The story chronicles a thorough subversion of the social order that fleetingly freed Antonia not only from the legal bonds of slavery but also from the gendered bonds of patriarchy, in a frontier province. Her narrative stands in stark contradiction to prescribed behaviors. Did the open spaces of this frontier afford her more freedom to deviate? It has been argued that in the urban mining center of Chihuahua in the eighteenth century, while there was some room for ethnic and class boundaries to be contested, the patriarchal system allowed little flexibility in regard to gender roles and female behavior. “Patriarchy furnished a relatively stable, non-negotiable set of governing principles even when all other rules came into question.”

In this chapter, I will look at the efficacy of church and state efforts to impose patriarchal ideals while more generally reinforcing the attempts
of Spanish elites to keep indigenous and mixed-race peoples in their place in less settled areas of Nueva Vizcaya. For the purposes of this study, social control encompasses the theory developed by the Spanish state and the practice that evolved for enforcing conformity to idealized gender and ethnic roles and relationships in areas under its effective political dominion. Throughout New Spain this control was always tentative and dependent on the allegiance of local elites and brokers and their ability to coerce and co-opt lower status groups. "The Spanish state...excelled at leaving government to others, including the church, at knowing its own limitations and possibilities, and in philosophically accepting what it could get as long as basic control and allegiances remained."

During the colonial period, the Spanish state exercised uneven jurisdiction over the vast expanses of Nueva Vizcaya, making its presence felt primarily in towns, mining centers, or reales, and to a lesser extent in missions. It never had much hold on the countryside. Separated by long distances, haciendas and urban areas stood vulnerable to hostile Indian groups throughout the colonial period. For this reason social control depended in part on limiting population movements across unsettled areas. To be sure, the Spanish Crown favored migrations when they were directed toward meeting the labor needs of Spanish mine owners and hacendados. But for the most part, free-flowing population movements were thought to encourage associations of peoples across spatial and ethnic lines in ways that were perceived to be subversive and destabilizing.¹ When this ethnic and cultural mixing was accompanied by gender transgressions, was it considered to be potentially even more threatening? Can Antonia's case shed light on this question?

**Antonia's Story**

After first confessing her story to Jesuit Father Tomás de Guadalajara, the twenty-year-old Antonia turned herself in to the Inquisition agent in Parral. Over the next two years, on several occasions in 1691 and 1692, she supplied further testimony about her activities during the previous six years. Her travels had taken her as far south as Veracruz and back again to the northern frontier. Her odyssey began when she escaped from her master (Francisco de Noriega) in the city of Durango, fleeing with a Tepehuan Indian worker named Matías de Rentería, also in his employ. They made their way first to Parral, a silver-mining town. There Antonia was aided by a mestiza woman nicknamed Juana Golpazos who gave her lily-like flowers
called caeomites to conceal under her clothing over her breasts, which she claimed made her unrecognizable to the overseer who had been sent to fetch her back to Durango.

From Parral Antonia and Matías fled with their magical herbs and flowers to Cusihuiriachi, where a flood of immigrants had recently arrived to exploit newly discovered silver. On the way there, Matías introduced Antonia to a new magical spell, induced by peyote. In her mind-altering visions, Antonia witnessed the skillful maneuvers of Matías as he successfully subdued a charging bull. In another state of trance they both learned to dance, taught by a beguiling woman who accompanied them on her guitar. As she recalled the dream state induced by the peyote mixture the two drank on Sundays, Antonia remembered also seeing many serpents, closely followed by an image of a very handsome man who appeared out of nowhere and promised her freedom “if she would be his.” She took this black-garbed figure to be the devil.

In their travels Antonia and Matías spent several days in the Jesuit mission of San Miguel de las Bocas (today Villa Ocampo in northern Durango), where Matías may have had Tepehuan kin. The presence of a mulatta slave in an Indian mission went unremarked, not surprising in this area of considerable Spanish and mixed-race inhabitants. The mission had been founded several decades earlier with both Tepehuan and Tarahumara converts, serving to produce corn and some wheat for the Parral market. By the 1660s it was surrounded by a dozen or so haciendas and ranches where many mission Indians supplied labor voluntarily or in repartimiento, the system of forced labor drafts that characterized mission areas in Nueva Vizcaya during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A good deal of cultural and ethnic interchange accompanied their farming and herding activities as they worked alongside mestizos, mulattoes, Nahuatl-speaking peoples from central Mexico, and other Indians. At the same time, dozens of Spanish vecinos attended church at the mission, and a few Spaniards and mixed-race peoples resided there. Servants from nearby haciendas participated in the elaborate celebrations that had become a hallmark of San Miguel de las Bocas at Corpus Christi and Easter. At one point, Jesuit Father Nicolás de Zeppeda counted 300 “vagrant vecinos in the area.” It was hardly surprising, therefore, that a mulatta slave drew little attention in Las Bocas a few years later.

It was in this multicultural milieu that Antonia experienced a remarkable transformation, as she continued to experiment with flowering herbs
and miraculous stones. She now, perhaps impulsively, made a pact with the devil. Her unholy bargain transformed her into a skilled horseman, bullfighter, and gambler. She donned men’s clothing and imagined a new, powerful life. One of the first signs of her newly acquired muscle was her ability to fight off an assault by her companion Matías, whom she nearly killed by beating him with a cattle prod. They apparently reconciled after this quarrel and set off once again, first spending some time in the unruly atmosphere of the new mining camps of Cusihuiriachi in western Chihuahua. In the next few years the two found work as vaqueros on cattle ranches in northern Durango. At one point Antonia hired on as a porter for a mule train that carried silver through Guanajuato to Veracruz, where it would be shipped to Spain. Returning with another muleteer, she passed through San Luis Potosí, eventually arriving back in the familiar territory of northern Durango.

Throughout these travels she continued to rub flowers and rosettes over her body and to use particular arrangements of magic stones and incantations to summon the devil. He usually appeared in the form of a white man in a black cape, but sometimes she could only hear him speaking to her, and once he materialized as a growling bear. Most often he came on horseback carrying a machete. In these encounters he spoke to her and empowered her to gamble, to break horses, and to fight bulls and even men. Her newly acquired skills proved effective beyond the defense of her person, at times leading her down a stormy path strewn with dead bodies. On one occasion in another mining camp of western Chihuahua, Coyachi, Antonia and three companions overpowered a mule train, killed three men, and made off with part of the silver shipment. When one of her accomplices snatched her silver-laden saddlebags, she pursued and killed him. Later, in the midst of a heated argument, she killed a coworker in Sinaloa. She had become more than just a man; now she was a violent bandit.

Eventually the harrowing experiences took their toll, at least on her conscience, and Antonia decided to give up her life as a swashbuckler. She made her confession to Father Tomás de Guadalajara in Parral, asking for forgiveness. A Jesuit missionary who had spent many years in the Tarahumara missions, Father Guadalajara told her that she would have to go before the Inquisition before he could give absolution. After hearing her testimony the Inquisition agent reported the incident to his superiors in Mexico City, asking how to proceed. Over the next two years Antonia supplied further testimony to various interrogators. During this time, she was
returned to her master in Durango who lost no time in selling her to a military officer, the captain of the presidio of Tepuchuanes. Perhaps this hacendado believed that a soldier could exercise more control over such a brazen troublemaker. Or, given her escapes and the trouble she had caused, he decided she was not worth the upkeep. Antonia’s tale comes to an abrupt end for us when the Inquisition decided in July of 1693 that she was sufficiently repentant to be absolved under ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The Inquisition ordered her case to be transferred to a civil court, but I have not been able to find any records for such a case.

The Inquisition as Agent of Social Control

Before delving more deeply into Antonia’s story, it is useful to consider the role of the Inquisition itself. As an institution for all of New Spain, it could be argued that it occupied the preeminent position as the proponent of social and religious conformity. Historians Solange Alberro and Noemí Quezada have suggested that it served the needs of a weak colonial state in the attempt to instill its values in a highly heterogeneous cultural and ethnic milieu. From its initial primary function in Spain to target Jewish and Muslim apostates (converts to Christianity who continued their previous religious practices), it was transplanted to New Spain where apostasy and heresy cases were much fewer, involving mostly conversos (suspect Jewish converts to Christianity) and the occasional Protestant pirate. For a short time, it had jurisdiction over cases of Indian idolatry, but given the impracticality of dispatching these transgressions in a short period among neophytes, as well as the potential for widespread rebellion from indigenous peoples who greatly outnumbered Spaniards, the Crown decided to leave the task of correcting these “heathens” to bishops (who relied on local parish priests for information).

Of the thousands of cases investigated by New Spain’s Holy Office, the great majority dealt with bigamy, blasphemy, sodomy, witchcraft, solicitation in the confessional, healing (curanderismo), misguided interpretations of the faith, and other similar offenses against the Catholic religion. Although it would be difficult to argue that the Inquisition was a major enforcer of social control in the north, the cases that it did pursue there reflect its goals and suggest that its coercive messages did have some psychological impact. Its geographical reach was broad, but the cases from the far north are relatively few, reflecting both the sparseness of the population and the ability of
nonconformists to escape detection in an area not completely incorporated by the state.

Policing the associations of lower status groups was not an easy task in the mountains and deserts of Nueva Vizcaya. Uncontrolled frontier expanses offered ample spaces for nonconformists to avoid oppressive conditions, providing what Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán termed "zones of refuge." Flight to inaccessible areas of the Sierra Madre Occidental proved to be the key factor in the ethnic persistence of some Indian groups like the Tarahumaras and the Tépehuanes. Somewhat paradoxically, their communities also sheltered mixed-race vagabonds from the Spanish world.

For most people who did resist, however, defiance of Spanish norms or protection from onerous demands was more covert and the relief all too fleeting. Nonetheless, there was no shortage of people who sought remedies. Diabolism, love magic, and other forms of hechicería (witchcraft) were practiced by women and men across class and ethnicity on the frontier, but a preponderance of petty witchcraft cases recorded by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico for the north concerns women. What can we learn from them about the extent and efficacy of church and state efforts to stem the subversion of patriarchal and racial ideals in frontier areas?²⁹

Discovering Women on the Margins of Empire

Inquisition scholar Solange Alberro has examined cases from the early northern mining centers, especially Zacatecas, and concluded that they had a more radically irreverent and macho "frontier" character that she attributes to a more mobile, less cohesive, and feebly policed society than those of the much more populous areas of central and southern Mexico.³⁰ If macho violence and volatility are frontier hallmarks, how should we understand the significance of transgressions of prescribed female behavior? A number of historians have begun to incorporate gender into their analyses of cross-cultural contact and captivity on frontiers only partially incorporated by the state on the northern and southern edges of the Spanish empire.³¹ Coincidentally, a few years ago a story that had only been known to a few scholars got a good deal of publicity when it was published in a book entitled Lieutenant Nun: Memoirs of a Basque Transvestite in the New World. This was the rather sensational title for the story of Catalina de Erauso, who as a young woman in 1600 fled from a convent in the Spanish Basque country to another frontier—remote areas of Peru and
Chile—where she gaddled about as a soldier and adventurer, “brawling her way through mining towns of the Andean highlands.” She was a gambler, distinguished for fighting skills, who even killed her own brother in a duel. Catalina’s thrilling story, which eventually reached the Pope, certainly seems to be a startling anomaly or exception to gender norms in the early modern Hispanic world.

In the last decade many textbook and conventional representations of colonial Latin American women have been shown to be stereotypical and misleading. A plethora of new studies demonstrates that women of all classes and ethnicities challenged the patriarchal order more frequently or in much more ingenious ways than we had previously thought. Far fewer women’s stories have been uncovered for Mexico’s far north, however, owing in part to lower population density. Exceptions include Cheryl Martin’s chapter on women, which describes a rigid patriarchal order in urban Chihuahua, and Cynthia Radding’s work on the productive and reproductive contributions of indigenous women in Sonora. Another is James Sandos’ article in this volume.

We know the least about Indian women because they rarely appear in the documentary sources, authored only by Spanish men. Occasionally we find court cases in which Indian women were litigants or the accused. Elsewhere I have examined the story of Ysidora de Medina, a Tarahumara wife and mother who killed her abusive, alcoholic husband in 1806. This event took place in a former Jesuit mission community in southern Chihuahua whose inhabitants were overwhelmingly non-Indian by the end of the colonial period. Ysidora was tried without benefit of trained counsel or sympathetic witnesses and imprisoned for many years under penalty of death. But this case of husband murder was so extraordinary that I could only speculate as to what it tells us about how the lives of Tarahumara women changed under Spanish rule and Catholic missions. Indian women seldom appear in court cases. Nor are Inquisition cases a rich source because Indians did not come under its jurisdiction. We frequently do find indigenous peoples in Inquisition cases as witnesses or sometimes supposed accomplices, but the information on them is more fragmentary than for non-Indians.

We are more likely to come upon non-Indian women in the archival documents for the north, especially in the eighteenth century, yet even here the record is thin for nonelite (or non-Spanish) women. Now and then, however, an exceptional story emerges in the records of the Inquisition in
Mexico City, as I discovered when I began to look for evidence of interethnic relationships between Indians in Nueva Vizcayan mission pueblos and outsiders. The preponderance of Inquisition cases brought diverse groups into contact around minor transgressions like love magic and healing. By comparison, Antonia’s adoption of male identity, induced largely through witchcraft, certainly seems a more glaring sacrilege.

Antonia’s Story as Female Agency

How did Antonia’s gender change escape notice in Nueva Vizcaya? Like Catalina de Erauso, the lieutenant nun, she traveled in the company of men who never seemed to detect her lack of male anatomy. (This raises intriguing questions about features of everyday communal life—for example, habits of bathing, eliminating waste, and sleeping.) How should we compare the motivations of these two women who decided that it would be advantageous to behave like men? Both women seem to fit the generalized modern-day definitions of either transvestite—“a person and especially a male who adopts the dress and often the behavior typical of the opposite sex especially for purposes of emotional or sexual gratification”—or transgendered—“exhibiting the appearance and behavioral characteristics of the opposite sex.” A recent interpretation from an extensive literary scholarship on Catalina de Erauso concludes that she was a lesbian, arguing that lesbianism was viewed benignly in the seventeenth-century Spanish world as long as there was no sign of genital contact or penetration. In the case of Antonia de Soto, we have little evidence as to her sexual orientation. Her testimony provides two hints: one, she rebuffed the sexual overtures of Matías; and two, the devil began to make love to her (empezó a... bacerle amores) when he asked her if she wanted him to possess her. Can we infer from this that her transgenderism was erotically inspired? What factors motivated these women to dress as men and how did they escape detection for so long?

There were plenty of models for donning men’s garb for purposes of combat and adventure. Stories of doncellas guerreras, or warrior maidens, were popular in Europe, circulating in ballads and theatrical performances. Scholars have noted numerous early modern examples of women who dressed as men “for a variety of purposes, including both heterosexual and same-sex romantic motives, patriotism, economic necessity, safety while traveling, criminality, and the desire for freedom and adventure.” In these
stories, women might be depicted as evildoers or heroines, but in either case masquerading as a male virtually always afforded them power at least for a while. Nonetheless, they could not be masculine for too long without suffering an infelicitous end. It is likely that Catalina and Antonia had both been exposed to tales of swashbuckling women. Catalina’s story itself became the subject of a Golden Age comedy by Juan Pérez de Montalbán, first performed in 1626.

In both Catalina’s and Antonia’s narratives, we find elements of the picaresque adventure story that customarily features a male rogue (a literary phenomenon that resulted from the preoccupations of Spain’s minor nobility in the social and economic milieu of the seventeenth century). These tales chronicle a series of events over time and place—the protagonists are always moving on to the next encounter or job. The accounts are replete with heroic feats, violence, trickery, gambling, and unrepentant criminal behavior. Both women traveled across vast territories and frontiers where conditions of social and political instability often prevailed. In Antonia’s case the volatility of the northern frontier was at a peak in the 1680s. The Pueblo Indian rebellion of 1680 had ripple effects to the south in Nueva Vizcaya, where fears of further Indian hostilities prompted the creation of several presidios to guard the royal road and shipments of silver to Mexico City. Then, in 1690, Tarahumara Indians rebelled in their recently established western missions of the Sierra Madre Occidental, reacting in part to Spanish attempts to coerce them to work in the new silver mines at Cusihuiriachi.¹⁹ Life for women could be especially precarious in the situation of constant warfare that prevailed in seventeenth-century Nueva Vizcaya. Toboso and other band groups on the eastern frontier of the camino real (royal road) were a part of a trading and raiding network in which the taking of captives provided means of subsistence, both for providing labor and reproductive assistance to sustain kin groups. Sometimes these captives, especially women and children, were incorporated into the bands; in other cases they were treated harshly as slaves.²⁰ Yet it was in these unpredictable circumstances that Antonia moved freely around the perilous countryside.

In this situation, it is not peculiar that Antonia (like Catalina) enjoyed the camaraderie of men as she gambled and caroused, and easily seemed to resort to violence. The weak presence of the Spanish state in areas where conquest was incomplete often served to generate volatility and brutality. In another similarity, both women were Christians, familiar with the teachings of the
Roman Catholic Church. Catalina even had an audience with the Pope. And in her confession and testimonies, Antonia repeatedly declared she was a pious Christian. Her understanding of the devil was based on church doctrine, and her physical descriptions of him indicate that she was familiar with demonic iconography and its phallic imagery. She had enough information to link her visions of serpents with the temptation of Eve. Recent scholarship makes a strong case that black and mulatto slaves had considerable knowledge of Christianity even though their religious education was often neglected by their owners.

It is from an ethnic perspective, however, that we can begin to probe the great divide between the two women’s worlds. Antonia’s interpretation of Catholic dogma was very different from Catalina’s, and it derived from her place as a mulatta slave. She did not enjoy the privilege of being white in colonial society. Even in her “freedom,” rather than command respect as a Spanish soldier/conquistador, she labored in lower status occupations available to mixed-race males. More telling, though, is that Antonia believed that she could exercise male prowess only through magic or subversion of the church’s order, while Catalina developed her fighting skills naturally and within the bounds of a militant Catholic Church. This last difference is of particular interest.

Folk Cultures of Resistance

Scholars of the African experience in Mexico have noted the propensity of slaves to blaspheme for very practical reasons. If a slave renounced God and invoked the devil during a beating, the owner was theoretically compelled to stop the punishment and turn over the blasphemer to the Inquisition. This strategy could bring temporary relief from physical punishment and sometimes provided an opportunity for a slave to denounce his or her master for suspicious behaviors, thus pitting patriarchs against each other. These actions ran the risk of calling down even greater penalties on the blasphemer, but the fact that blasphemy was so commonplace indicates that it had the potential to alleviate desperate situations. In our story, Antonia went one step further than denying the power of God, by actually embracing the devil to alleviate her oppression. She also engaged in other forms of witchcraft taught to her by a number of other marginal people she came into contact with. Blacks and mulattos throughout New Spain were frequently drawn into this world of syncretic magic.
Here the folk practices of diverse racial groups often intersected and brought Indians, mestizos, mulattos, and Spaniards into close contact. In this case, Antonia was introduced to magic by the Tépehua Matías and the mestiza Juana Golpazos (a nickname suggesting she was a heavy-hitting tough). Antonia ingested peyote, the hallucinogenic effects of which could be powerful. Peyote, ground into powder and mixed with water, was commonly used in curing and love magic. She gave magic charms to other transients she met in her travels, among them an Apache Indian and a mulatto slave. The Inquisition asked her quite direct questions about these associations, revealing official concern about the ways in which a popular subculture could undermine royal authority. Colonial laws attempted to regulate travel, which was believed to promote social intercourse in rural areas, and to control the ethnically heterogeneous working classes of mining towns in the north. While authorities sought to impose social controls on the lower echelons of society, Indian and mixed-race northern migrants cominged with immigrants from the south (e.g., muleteers, itinerant vendors, and artisans), and attempted to forge new social networks.

In the north, livestock ranches with their wide open spaces were a common site of diabolic activity, as Fernando Cervantes has argued.

It is perhaps no accident that most of the cases of self-assertive diabolism should come from a group of people engaged primarily in herding and riding activities; for such groups would come to constitute what was in many ways a world apart in New Spain. Drawing on the marginal culture developed among mestizos, mulattos, and a number of social misfits who had not found their place among Spaniards or Indians, shepherds and cowherds gradually developed a lore that partook of Indian, African and Iberian magic and which spread throughout the more or less geographically defined region stretching to the southwest into Michoacán and to the north into Zacatecas and Nueva Vizcaya.

Antonia lived in this world of itinerant associations, of stories told and ballads sung around the campfire, and of meetings with the devil in remote places. Other scholars of the Inquisition have suggested that in areas of greater interethnic mixing and more mobile populations, witchcraft and pacts with the devil were more common. Antonia’s story is a vivid example of the
ineffectiveness of the Crown's attempts to limit geographic mobility and ethnic mixing, especially in less populated northern areas. Her case offers a startling illustration of how the practical use of supernatural or divine power could be perceived as destabilizing.

The Church's Power to Shame

At the time Antonia met up with the devil, she had already achieved a certain liberty by escaping from her duties as a slave. But her gender imposed definite limitations on this so-called "freedom." The need to enhance her capacity for self-protection became all the more apparent in her dealings with her companion, Matías. The devil evoked by Antonia comes across to us as the alter ego of a male patriarch or master in his compassionate (and perhaps sexual?) side, but he offered more than comfort. He was the dispenser of the skills she needed to defend herself—skills that were the preserve of only men. She asked for the same macho skills that men sought (through natural or supernatural means) in order to elevate their status—to be skilled equestrians, bullfighters, and gamblers. Although we might see this today as the most hackneyed version of machismo, contemporaries might have seen her actions as a kind of noble defiance (because it was masculine) that went beyond petty sorcery and trickery (perceived as weak or effeminate recourses). The devil was the provider of expertise that could be empowering; at the same time, it fostered or furthered violence, which meant that Antonia lived in a day-to-day atmosphere of uncertainty and fearful consequences.

Her testimony suggests that Antonia was very ambivalent about the devil. She chose him as her champion in an impetuous moment of drug-induced delusion. Above all, he was a masterful, if sinister, advocate for the underprivileged. At first, she seems to have seen him as a trickster who could be temporarily invoked and then ignored. As time went on she appears to have taken his power more seriously; she invoked him as a means of appropriating his power, and he obligingly extricated her from many perilous situations. At some point, however, this benign force (in the sense that she could control its awesome power) began to pale in comparison to her fear of God as the power most likely to inflict dreadful consequences (a preoccupation that may have grown stronger as she matured).

The internal mechanisms of social control instilled by the moral admonitions regarding obedience to the church undermined and over time eroded
the satisfactions of her new status. Antonia had invoked the devil to transcend femininity and domesticity, alienating herself from the home and becoming a violent itinerant adventurer. Ultimately, however, she could not sustain this lifestyle. Perhaps she grew weary of it, but her need to confess also suggests the strong influence on her psyche of Catholic prescriptions for proper behavior. These could have come from the everyday coercion of her life as a slave, from her owners, her overseer, or from the local priest. Spanish Hapsburg officials were also effective at using religious spectacle and staged performances to establish a quasi-religious state legitimacy. Self-disgust or fear—the inability to reconcile her illicit activities with Catholic teachings—seem to have motivated her choice (or was it her choice?) to turn herself in. As one historian has noted, “the empire found or co-opted or created groups, even among the oppressed, who accepted its legitimacy and found the imperial system, on balance to be more tolerable, given real risks and possibilities than any imagined alternatives.”

On the other hand, if Antonia felt that she was about to be exposed, she may have realized that she would have a better chance if she got a hearing that allowed her to assert her contrition. Self-confessions helped to diminish the punishment if it was clear that the sinner truly wished to be reintegrated into the fold. Colonial records indicate that slaves were rarely punished for demonic complicity in Mexico.

Love Magic

On the whole, we often find women denouncing themselves to the Inquisition, but most of these cases involve much less serious transgressions than pacts with the devil—they incorporate a whole range of minor magical practice. Even petty offenses could provoke self-guilt and shame in a society suffused with inquisitorial prescription. Resort to petty witchcraft was common throughout colonial Spanish America, and this kind of magic seems to have been most commonly practiced by women of lower social status. We know of many cases that concerned sorcery for healing, love magic, and protection from abusive relationships. Most cases of witchcraft involved domestic situations or aspirations, and the protagonists could be men or women. Magic was employed for attracting marriage partners (or at least protection), for curbing abusive male behavior, or, in the case of the practitioners, for earning a living.

The earliest denunciations of love magic that I have found for Nueva Vizcaya come from the early mining establishments and are directed
against both men and women. Although women were by far more likely to employ love magic in the later colonial period, in the early seventeenth century when fewer female Spaniards or gente de razón (non-Indians) were present in the north, men were likely to be more insecure about their ability to attract marriage or sexual partners. By employing a secret incantation, Bartolomé de Salas, a Spanish miner from the mining real of San Andrés in Topia, was purportedly able to attract "all the women he wanted." Here we have the sense that his denouncer, a muleteer, was envious of this rival in the competition for females. Invoking the power of the Holy Spirit, Bartolomé called on the devil to dispose particular women to do his sexual bidding. In a different kind of recourse, women, both Spanish and mestiza, were more likely to use potions and powders to attract men. These were concocted out of various substances of plant, animal, and human body origin, and they were often ingested in the ubiquitous cup of chocolate or in other foods. Herbs and plants varied locally, but the fauna employed tended to be the same as in other parts of Mexico (and Europe). For example, the documents cite worms, lizards, mucous from various birds, fish, and dried burro brains. Secretions and parts of the body were perhaps the most common ingredients in these concoctions: menstrual blood, water used to wash private parts, semen, excrement, hair, nails, teeth, and bones. Peyote was also employed to attract lovers or to make them impotent. These measures seem to have been universally known to mixed-race hacendia servants who lived in close quarters in varying states of subservience. Mulattos, mestizos, Apache captives, and other Indian workers lived in close contact, sharing their cures and antidotes for getting by on a daily basis.

Father Calderón and the Consequences of Love Magic

Mining towns also facilitated this kind of interethnic, cross-cultural exchange of information. By 1721, the non-Indian population of Cusihuiriachi, where Antonia had spent some time in its rough-and-ready founding days, had swollen to over a thousand. After its early bonanza, silver production had declined somewhat, leaving the fates of many Spanish and casta miners and petty entrepreneurs to chance. Cockfights, card playing, and other venues for gambling provided distractions and attracted other Spaniards from surrounding mines and haciendas who came to buy supplies from the Basque store owners who had entrenched themselves at the
turn of the century. The Jesuit priest at the Tarahumara mission of San Francisco Borja to the south was one of its regular visitors. A _criollo_ from Mexico City, Father Felipe de Calderón was in his thirties. Probably drawn there first to buy items not included in the mission supply shipments that came irregularly from Mexico City, he soon succumbed to other enticements that had unforeseen and unwelcome consequences. In a despairing attempt to overcome these, in April 1721 Father Calderón traveled southeast to Parral where he sought out the local agent of the Inquisition to make a denunciation. The primary target of his list of charges was Cristina de Villanueva, the wife of José de Acuña, a Spanish petty trader down on his luck. Calderón alleged that he had been seduced by Cristina who had not only employed an arsenal of love magic tricks but also used her “diabolical arts” to make him ill. The sickness consisted of chronic intestinal ailments as well as sexual impotence.

How Calderón had initially become acquainted with Cristina, her husband, and her father, Juan Núñez de Villanueva, is not known to us, but sometime in 1720 the Jesuit had become a frequent visitor to their home. His troubles began when he accompanied Cristina on a visit to her friend María (known by her nickname La Chanes), who was married to Francisco Ramos. They spent the night there apparently continuing a sexual liaison, which had begun some time earlier at the instigation of Calderón. The next morning, back in her own home, Cristina offered him a cup of chocolate. In retrospect, he identified this moment with the onset of his physical problems.

Although he continued to have sexual relations with Cristina, Father Calderón began to experience intestinal problems, ejecting “worms, pieces of bone, hair, bristles, and other filth” from his body. As time went on, he came to connect incidents that had occurred in Cristina’s home to his maladies. As he tried to extricate himself from the relationship with her, he realized that he was unable to have sex with anyone else—he was “ligado,” or tied, in the parlance of the times. In the early weeks of 1721, Calderón was seemingly powerless to resist Cristina’s attempts to seduce him in her own home, where she was allegedly abetted in her efforts by her husband and her father. Before the Jesuit became fully convinced that he had been bewitched (_maleficiado_), he accepted a number of cures offered by Cristina for the intestinal problems, but instead of getting better his health continued to deteriorate. These ineffectual remedies and still others he sought from other Indian and mixed-race _curanderos_ ended up costing him several hundred pesos. Nor were visits to nearby parish priests efficacious in removing the
spells he believed she had cast. After several months, Calderón went to the Inquisition with his bizarre tale of illness, witchcraft, sexual perversions, curanderismo, abuse of Christian images, and a pact with the devil.

According to the Jesuit, Cristina had a history of many premarital affairs with local residents through which she had perfected “the art of tying men,” including the one she married. Calderón admitted that because of her ill repute (común fama), he had initially perceived her as an easy conquest. She had continued to sleep with other men after her marriage, apparently with the approval of her husband and father (who may have been soliciting clients for her). Her father was alleged to have taught her many practices of witchcraft and healing. Among these was the use of peyote and potions concocted from a variety of herbs and plants. “Tying” men was accomplished through bundles that contained her own pubic hair wrapped around chameleons. Judging from the evidence we have, it is likely that Cristina de Villanueva engaged in magical and healing practices as a means of procuring some extra income for her family.

The Gendering of Deviance

In Calderón’s testimony we see several strategies for discrediting Cristina. He casts her as a prostitute, a witch, and a curandera. He claimed to have seen her sign a pact with the devil in blood, and he cited the presence in her home of many images and animal familiares associated with Satan. Furthermore, she had contact with unsavory women of inferior ethnicity. Her connections to two mulattas and four indias, including an Apache, a Sonoran, and a Nahuatl speaker, made her even more suspect since these Indian and mixed-race women were deemed to have a proclivity to use the occult. Father Calderón interwove references to these “shady associations” throughout his testimony to enhance a portrait of her as lascivious, depraved, and treacherous. At the same time he also named a number of other prominent local Spaniards who had succumbed to her wiles and perhaps attempts at extortion. It is interesting that his characterization of the “temptress” and “witch” obviates any direct reference to Cristina as a mother, even though at least two children are mentioned obliquely in his charges.

Why would this Jesuit priest go to such lengths to discredit Cristina de Villanueva, especially when it meant publicly exposing his own lack of celibacy, a violation of his priestly vows? For one thing, the violation of celibacy was commonplace in the Iberian world and was not considered
to be particularly grievous unless it occurred as a result of solicitation in the confessional. As other scholars have pointed out, Catholic clergymen were in an anomalous position in a world where masculinity was heavily tied to sexual activity. This helps to explain why priestly liaisons were tolerated as long as they were relatively discreet. In this case, Calderón’s afflictions constituted a pathology that drove him to seek the intervention of the Inquisition. A modern observer might see these as psychosomatic illnesses that, for him, demanded an explanation. From his testimony it is difficult to ascertain which of his ailments was most bothersome, but he seems to have been most tormented by the state of being “tied” and dominated by a woman. There is also some evidence that the affair with Cristina had begun through solicitation in the confessional and that he hoped to preempt her denunciation of this sin or charges by a third party.

In the end, the Holy Office declined to pursue his accusations, perhaps because they were perceived as too difficult to substantiate or too destabilizing of priestly legitimacy or authority on a turbulent frontier. Also, the Jesuit’s testimony implies that Inquisition officials might have been compromised in her “nefarious” network. This is suggested by another case forwarded to Mexico City from Cusihuiriachi in 1721 that brought charges against a mulatta, Antonia de la Fabela. She was alleged to have been employed by several aggrieved wives to induce illness or impotence in their wayward husbands or their lovers. The interesting thing about this case is that Antonia de la Fabela was a servant in the household of the Inquisition commissary, Agustín Sánchez de Cantillana. The testimonies in the case show that she had been engaged in these practices for more than 15 years, indicating that the inquisitorial agent either did not know what transpired under his nose or that he was unconcerned.

Whatever the reasons for the dismissal of the case, Father Calderón’s allegations provide clues as to local society’s views of proper gender behavior. The testimony constructs Cristina de Villanueva as the nemesis of an ideal patriarchal order that placed women below men in a clear sexual hierarchy and that tried to circumscribe women’s participation in the public sphere. Using love magic Cristina reversed the order within her own family and also in the lay/ cleric relationship that idealized the paternal role of the priest. Father Calderón clearly believed that she had power over him. Of course this is one of the reasons that the church condemned love magic—it took away free will. This was in all likelihood perceived as a greater sin when directed against men. The language employed by men and women when
they talked about the use of love magic also reveals gender differences that accorded males exclusivity in domination. While men used verbs such as alcanzar (to take or obtain), women were more likely to choose atraer (to attract) or aficionar (to inspire a liking) to describe their actions.

Women most often engaged in these practices as a way to seek protection and security—we could construe them as classic "weapons of the weak" or a kind of mild subversion that was often tolerated in colonial society. The association of love magic with diabolical pacts was more threatening, but by the eighteenth century, ecclesiastical authorities were less concerned with the influence of the devil in New Spain.45 So the Jesuit priest’s allegations could have been perceived by the Inquisition authorities in Mexico City as a tempest in a teapot, even though he constructed a portrait of Cristina that made her out to be much more than a woman looking for security. In his mind, she was deliberately seeking power by controlling men's bodies.

Of course she did not achieve these goals all by herself. She had a network of accomplices who enabled her. Even the more transient Antonia seemed to have no trouble linking up with supporters. In these and other inquisitorial cases we are given intimate glimpses of social networks, most often interethnic, that furnish clues as to what people were actually thinking and disclose a coincidence of sympathies among groups arrayed in different mixes of class, ethnicity, and gender.46 Historians who have studied relationships between lower caste groups in large urban areas have argued that the state was somewhat effective in the kind of divide-and-rule tactics that inhibited lower-class solidarity,47 but I would argue that frontier conditions were more likely to encourage cross-cultural reliance. The cases I have examined reveal close associations between men and women from diverse indigenous groups and castas who occupied subordinate positions in an especially unpredictable world. It is interesting that Father Calderón placed great emphasis on a web of uncontrollable women. To be sure, this network straddled ethnic and class boundaries, but it downplayed the influence of males to the point of emasculating them.

Conclusions

In my book on ethnic persistence among indigenous groups of Nueva Vizcaya, I trace the processes of ethnic mixing and demonstrate that changing intersections of ethnicity, culture, class, and identity on this frontier
were shaped largely by local, often distinctively frontier factors. When the state intervened it tended to mirror these processes rather than transform them. I have already suggested that state social control was severely limited in the north where violence was endemic as a result of several factors. The first is characteristic of the Spanish empire as a whole: the coercion that local elites exercised in limited areas engendered violent responses in turn. The other two are peculiar to the frontier: (1) the relative absence of effective coercive administrative mechanisms, and (2) continuous warfare with indigenous peoples.

In general I would argue that deviance was less clear-cut and less threatening in this milieu. The failure of the Inquisition to severely punish or even pursue aberrant behavior is one indicator. The Holy Office virtually ignored the cases of petty witchcraft that sought to manipulate gender relationships. The allegations presented in the cases and the inquisitorial questioning around them do tell us a good deal about both idealized and subverted patterns of gender relations. From them we get glimpses, rich in anecdotal lore, of the ways in which a very diverse body of frontier women in Nueva Vizcaya interacted and positioned themselves in a hierarchical, patriarchal order. They also suggest that royal authorities could be circumscribed in their efforts to control “wild,” undisciplined women, especially outside of the more settled urban areas of the north like the mining center of Chihuahua. Female sexuality was not always subject to vigilant control.

In the two cases profiled in greatest detail in this article, we have women who deliberately subverted the patriarchal order. Their stories are not typical, but they do allow us to make some observations about the boundaries that theoretically delimited women’s roles, as well as how ethnicity and gender intersected along this idealized behavioral map. In both cases we see the blurring of boundaries as these women inverted gender hierarchies and occupied liminal (or in-between) spaces. Both women jumped outside the norms of domesticity to assume some control over their material and affective circumstances. For Antonia, the leap was more radical and transformative, allowing her to transcend both legal subjugation and female submissiveness. Her ethnic oppression in slavery was a burden, but she did not believe it was as debilitating as her gender. For Antonia de Soto, the freedom to act on her own was clearly rooted in male stereotypes. Power derived from maleness in either of the two worlds she claimed to know—the Spaniards’ or the devil’s. In the end, her usurpation of diabolic
supermale energy could not eradicate the seeds of Christian obedience that had germinated in her psyche.

Cristina de Villanueva did not have to stray quite so far to reverse the patriarchal order. In her woman’s body, she alternated between seducing and emasculating a Jesuit priest, rendering this symbol of paternal celibacy both sexually and spiritually impotent. Her success (either as a breadwinner or as a temptress) was also dependent upon harnessing male power. In both cases, the women were supported in their activities through alliances and confidences that crossed ethnic lines. Resisting the confines of their established place in the class and gender hierarchy, they negotiated daily with subalterns (Indians, mulattos, mestizos, servants, cooks, cowboys, herdsmen, carters, and mineworkers) and elites (officials, priests, and landowners). In these activities they were not so different from other women who lived in the far north. We might have assumed that their more contemptuous or audacious boundary crossings would have wrought more serious consequences. But even their alleged pacts with the devil elicited either moderate or no response; there was no compelling urge to mete out exemplary punishments as a deterrent to others. Being “betwixt and between” in gendered terms seems not to have been terribly threatening in less settled areas where violence and abnormality were the rule. That would change in the eighteenth century as the non-Indian population grew and patriarchal repression supplant ed the more gratuitous forms of violence that characterized a fractious frontier.

NOTES

1. Denunciación que contra si hizo Antonia de Soto, mulata esclava de Francisco de Noriega, vecino de la Ciudad de Durango de diferentes hechos con pacto con el demonio, 1691, Inquisición, vol. 525, exp. 48, fols. 500–520, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico (hereafter cited as AGN). See Laura A. Lewis, Hall of Mirrors: Power, Witchcraft and Caste in Colonial Mexico (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 167–72, for an analysis of this case that advances her arguments about domains of sanctioned and unsanctioned power in colonial Mexico, and especially the positioning of caste and gender in these realms.


4. ibid.


9. We should note that the study of patterns of racial exogamy in marriages would also shed light on the colonial state’s ability to preserve racial purity among elites. Suggestive are the studies of Durango by Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah, *Essays in Population History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), vols. 1 and 2, which show such a high percentage of pardos; and the analysis of marriage patterns in urban areas by Michael Swann, *Tierra Adentro: Settlement and Society in Colonial Durango* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982).


21. African slaves had been brought to the north from the early days of the conquest. And from her designation as a mulatta, we can surmise that Antonia was acculturated.


32. Cervantes, The Devil in the New World, 79; see also the cases involving slaves, 1611, Topia, Inquisición, vol 292, AGN.


34. For a survey of love magic cases from the Mexican Inquisition, see Quezada, “Cosmovisión, sexualidad e Inquisición,” in Quezada et al., Inquisición novobispana, 2:77–86.

35. Denunciation by Hernando de Alessa, San Andrés, 23 March 1627, Inquisición, vol. 560, exp. 2, fol. 374, AGN. To increase his chances of getting the devil’s ear, Bartolomé called him by multiple names: Reb, Adon, Belial, Asmodeus, and Belsebu.


40. Ibid., 497v–498. Similar tactics in the portrayal of women have been noted by other scholars; e.g. Behar, “Witchcraft, Colonialism, and Women’s Powers,” 194–99; María Elena Sánchez Ortega, “Sorcery and Eroticism in Love Magic,” in *Cultural Encounters*, ed. Perry and Cruz, 59–60.

41. Calderón complained in his letter of 16 July, 1721, that regional Inquisition officials were notorious in violating the rules of secrecy that were supposed to guide their investigations, Inquisición, vol. 791, fol. 500, AGN.


43. Antonia de la Fabela de casta mulata por maléfica, Gusihuirachi, October 1721, Inquisición, vol. 789, fol. 196–211, AGN.

44. I thank my former student, Scott Wolf, for this observation in his: “Sex, Sickness, Magic, and Power: The Case of Padre Felipe Calderón,” unpublished ms.

45. Cervantes, *The Devil in the New World*.

46. Other scholars have called attention to the exchanges of magic and ritual that occur across the margins of different cultures; for example, Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 295, and Bristol, “Negotiating Authority in New Spain,” 259–63.


49. MacLeod, “Thoughts on the Pax Colonial,” 139–42.