

ENGENDERING NATION AND RACE IN THE BORDERLANDS

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REFUSING THE FAVOR: THE SPANISH-MEXICAN WOMEN OF SANTA FE, 1820–1880. By Deena J. González. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. 186. \$45.00 cloth.)

DEWON THE THORN. By Jovita González, edited by José Limón. (Houston, Tex.: Arte Público, 1997. Pp. 181. \$12.95 paper.)

CABALLERO, A HISTORICAL NOVEL. By Jovita González and Eve Raleigh. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1996. Pp. 350. \$19.95 paper.)

THE GREAT ARIZONA ORPHAN ABDUCTION. By Linda Gordon. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999. Pp. 416. \$29.95 cloth.)

INTIMATE FRONTIERS: SEX, GENDER, AND CULTURE IN OLD CALIFORNIA. By Albert L. Hurtado. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999. Pp. 173. \$39.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

ROARING CAMP: THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH. By Susan Lee Johnson. (New York: Norton, 2000. Pp. 464. \$29.95 cloth.)

For nearly four centuries, the borderlands—the region on either side of the border that now divides the United States and Mexico—has witnessed multiple collisions, conquests, and accommodations among an array of native peoples and representatives of the Spanish Empire, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the United States. Although scholars on both sides of the border have long studied the region, recent developments have sparked renewed academic interest in the borderlands. Once peripheral to both countries, today the border zones are burgeoning demographically and economically. The movement of human beings and goods across the border, especially after the signing of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, has become an important subject of political debate and agitation for elected officials and grassroots activists alike. For some, the increasing global prominence of border regions suggests that nations (even the powerful United States) are not the almighty institutions they once seemed. Historians and scholars therefore should not assume that nations are the inevitable vessels of sovereignty, popular identity, or collective aspiration. From this perspective, the physical edges of countries and empires may reveal the most about

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the contingency of national histories and provide the best prospects for creating accounts of the past that cross borders freely.¹

This essay will review a handful of recent publications on gender and the borderlands. Although diverse in structure, approach, and argument, all six works seek to place gender roles and relations at the heart of encounters among the many peoples of the borderlands. State-building is not merely a matter of armies and bureaucrats drawing abstract borderlines but also of how people come to link, or refuse to link, their daily lives and shifting identities to the larger imagined community of a nation. These works collectively remind readers that gender roles and sexual relations play critical roles in this process. States, empires, tribal communities, and racial groups all seek to create and maintain certain family arrangements that facilitate their own claims to sovereignty or social dominance. Their subjects' intimate lives—their sexual behavior, their self-conception as gendered beings, their notions of family—can by turns advance, undermine, or complicate the larger state and racial projects that have repeatedly redrawn the map of North America.

Albert Hurtado most directly links gender to conquest and domination in his compact yet powerful study of colonial California, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California*. As he explains at the outset, “[F]amily formation had much to do with who would control California—Indians, Europeans, people of mixed blood, or Americans” (p. xxi). Hurtado focuses on marriage, “the formal institution where heterosexual intercourse was permitted and its biological consequences—children—were encouraged” (p. xxiii). He argues that those contending for control of the region deliberately used the institution of marriage to bolster their projects for conquering California.

The Spanish clergy used marriage as one of their dominance techniques in two ways: by encouraging the marriage of Spanish men with Indian women and by limiting Spanish-Indian sexual encounters outside holy matrimony. The children of sanctioned unions most often “attached themselves firmly to the religion and society of their Spanish fathers,” and consequently, Spanish colonial authorities viewed sexual amalgamation as a process that “served to disable native society and strengthen the Hispanic population as it drew Indians and their children into the colonial orbit” (p. 6). Thus Father Junípero Serra, founder of the Franciscan missions in California, supported regulations that encouraged such marriages by providing newlyweds with a seaman’s wages for two years and rations for five.

1. For recent discussions of borderlands and transnational history, see Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 813–841; the responses to it in *American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (Oct. 1999):1221–39; and David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3:965–75.

Marriage hardly encompassed all sexual relations, however, and therefore hopes like Serra's collided with the reality of nonmarital sexual relations, including what he considered to be the appallingly frequent rape of Indian women by Spanish soldiers. Colonial authorities condemned both consensual and nonconsensual extramarital relations but seemed to fear the latter most. Sexual assaults were so deeply and bitterly resented by Indian communities that they often helped precipitate anti-colonial rebellions. While priests frequently blamed rape on the supposed "licentiousness" of Indian women, they feared the potential to make their charges "turn on us like tigers," in Serra's words (p. 14).

Control of native sexuality was as important to the leaders of Spanish colonialism as their own soldiers' sexual behavior. Simple fostering of the Christian sacrament of marriage was not enough, for while both the Spanish and the natives regarded marriage as a fundamental social institution, their understandings of appropriate roles for men and women within marriage were strikingly different. Both cultures expected spouses to be faithful to one another, but many Indian groups also sanctioned polygyny (multiple wives) for powerful men. Virginity was not required of a respectable wife for Indians, unlike Spanish customs. And although the church rarely granted divorces, most native cultures seemed to have allowed for either husband or wife to dissolve the marital union and seek a more compatible partner. The most dramatic contrast in sexual mores was no doubt the natives' berdache tradition. Biological males who dressed and acted like women, berdache often married men "who were regarded as perfectly ordinary heterosexual males" (p. 4). The Spanish rejected these unions as homosexual abominations. Spanish rule thus entailed efforts not only to get individuals to marry under the auspices of the Catholic Church but also to make their marriages conform to proper Catholic doctrine.

Native defenses of their own notions of sexuality and the sometimes divergent interests of soldiers and priests prevented the Spanish Empire from fully controlling the sexual behavior of its subjects. After Mexico became independent, the marriage patterns of elite Californios, heirs to the rich lands and herds of the missions, tied the province more closely to the economy of the United States, eventually undermining the Mexican government's hopes for continued dominance. The daughters of these families disproportionately married Anglo Americans and Europeans and seldom married Indians. White men had several attractions as marriage partners. Most had come to California to do business and thus offered trading ties that the resource-rich but cash-poor Californios desperately needed. And their whiteness appealed to elite families concerned about maintaining the supposed purity of their bloodlines. For Anglos, such marriages offered property and potential advantage in trade and prevented them from otherwise going unmarried for the many years that they were likely to spend away from their original homes in the United States. Boston merchant Thomas Larkin set

out his conditions for marrying a California: "If I had any (say, a little) love for the Lady, and the Lady had loot enough for me" (p. 30).

The economic importance of marriage and the relative abundance of men in frontier California contributed to strict family controls over the sexuality of the Californias. Most of their marriages were arranged, and nuptial commitments before the bride had reached menarche were not uncommon. Hurtado recounts the extraordinary betrothal of Sergeant Ygnacio Vicente Ferrer Vallejo and María Antonia Isabela Lugo. Vallejo was visiting the Lugo family when he was called on to use his medical knowledge to attend the childbirth of Señora Lugo. When offered a fee for his services, he asked instead to marry the very child whom he had just helped deliver. The family agreed, and María and Ygnacio were married fourteen and a half years later, when the groom was forty (p. 27).

Like the Spanish before them, some Anglo men chose Indian marriage partners, particularly in the inland portions of the state, where Indians were a substantial majority and often militarily dominant. Here Californias were apparently much less desirable marriage partners in the eyes of American men. Hurtado found no instances of Yankee-California weddings in the interior. Unions between Anglo men and Indian women (often recognized as marriages) were useful as long as Indian peoples wielded significant power in California. After the 1848 gold rush, however, Indian numbers declined catastrophically and Anglo-Indian marriages were scorned by most newcomer Americans—in many cases, by the former husbands themselves. Californios were considered a landed white people, but Indians were an inferior racial minority. As one Anglo miner described the new U.S. state after the gold rush, "Squaw time is about over in California" (p. 97). Whereas the Spanish Empire had fostered interracial marriages in order to cement its power, the United States, California's new ruler, would insist equally on preventing them.

The distinctive gender dynamics of the California gold rush (the subject of the last portion of Hurtado's book) is the focus of Susan Johnson's *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*. This global event drew migrants from Sierran Indian bands, east Asia, Chile, Mexico, New England, and Western Europe. Although the territory they inhabited was under U.S. control, it was not immediately clear what rules or group would run the chaotic and polyglot world that these migrants created. The ten years from 1848 to 1858, Johnson observes, "marked a time and place of tremendous contests about maleness and femaleness, about color and culture, and about wealth and power" (p. 51). The extreme demographics of the gold fields—"the relative absence of women, the overwhelming presence of men of many nations and colors and creeds, and the wild fluctuation of local economies"—kept anxieties about gender, race, culture, and class at a fevered pitch (p. 51).

Roaring Camp offers an extended tour through this distinctive world.

While Hurtado uses a tight focus on the regulation of marriage and sexuality to take his readers through a long period and several fundamental changes in California society, Johnson puts gold rush society under a microscope and uses gender to unravel its complex and shifting alliances and identities. As in Hurtado's depiction of California, control over sexuality and political dominance went hand in hand. Thus white men often fetishized Indian women as sexual objects but almost never took them as long-term partners. Ethnic Mexicans celebrated the heroic enemies of Anglo dominance, such as the famous "bandit" Joaquín Murieta, opposing "a Yankee discourse of manhood and morality" with their own legends of masculine defiance (p. 44).²

The arrival of large numbers of white women in the 1850s signaled the end of the gold rush's distinctiveness. They played a critical role in "taming" California by curtailing gambling, drinking, prostitution, and much of the openness in gender roles that had characterized the region. By the end of Johnson's account, the gold rush

had been domesticated in both senses of the word: Anglo Americans had come to understand the Gold Rush in the context of nineteenth-century domestic ideology, and they also had claimed the event as a domestic episode—an episode in national history. . . . Just as it was incorporated into everyday economic and social thought of the dominant, so too was the Gold Rush assimilated into narratives of nation building, so that gold seeking came to represent perils and possibilities not merely for individuals but for the American nation itself. (P. 322)

Hurtado ends *Intimate Frontiers* on a similar note: "Security lay in old habits, well-known customs, the comfortable conventions of the old country, whether it was Spain, Mexico, the United States, or someplace else. Californians meant for their respective societies to transform California, not vice versa" (p. 129).

Although Johnson stresses the role of women in "normalizing" gender relations and thereby incorporating California into the mainstream of the middle-class U.S. culture, the true power of *Roaring Camp* comes from her detailed and often beautiful depiction of the possibilities that were lost. The story of the gold rush was a narrative of not only conquest, dominance, and exploitation from above but also fluidity and contingency for ordinary people. For a brief time, social life in California presented viable options that did not exist elsewhere. The scarcity of women meant that gender roles had to be more flexible than they were in Boston, Chihuahua, or Brussels. Cooking and laundry were perforce men's work, either shared by rotation within a group of miners or sometimes delegated to a man more talented or enthusiastic than his companions (p. 114). Anglo men often imputed greater domestic orientation to European arrivals. Johnson observes, "More explicitly

2. The term *ethnic Mexican* refers to all people of Mexican descent, whether recent immigrants to the United States, well-established residents, or those of unclear background.

than back home, where gender could be mapped predictably onto bodies understood as male and female, gender in California chased shamelessly after racial and cultural markers of difference, heedless of bodily configurations" (p. 118). But even resistant Anglo men found themselves cooking, cleaning house, and doing laundry. And the intensity with which they observed the Miwok Indians' organization of men's and women's work suggests that many found reason for greater self-reflection in the peculiar circumstances of their own lives.

If the gold rush could be a brutal world for women (especially Indian women), it also offered them new opportunities. Women unhappy or abused in their marriages easily found other, perhaps more congenial partners, both inside and outside marriage. Recurring charges of marital infidelity leveled against women in divorce proceedings suggest that many women availed themselves of these opportunities (p. 287). Many also found economic opportunities by "owning, managing, and working in dance halls, gambling saloons, and brothels . . . where California gold found its way out of the hands of men from around the world and into the hands of women from Mexico, Chile, and France" (p. 297).

Johnson presents suggestive evidence in *Roaring Camp* that the distinct conditions of the California gold rush opened new territory for male sexuality. The overwhelmingly male mining camps were by definition homosexual. Even social events like dances came off quite well without women. Dancers simply agreed that a man "who had a patch on a certain part of his inexpressibles" would be treated as a woman. One boy who danced a Scottish stomp dance was offered so many drinks, one attendee remembered, that "if he had drunk with all the men who then sought the honor of 'treating' him, he would never have lived to read another measure" (p. 173). Homosexuality shaded into homoeroticism, as the dance seemed to suggest it might. With few women available, little wonder that some men found refuge in each other's arms. While most of these unions were only hinted at in diaries and memoirs, at least one was clearly preserved in letters. Tuolumne County miners Jason Chamberlain and John Chaffee lived together for more than fifty years near the Yosemite Valley. In 1899 Jason wrote in his diary, "This is the Jubilee Number or 50 years together" (p. 336). The gold rush was long gone, but their relationship indicated that its sometimes liberating effects were not. More than a few male commentators lamented the arrival of women in this world. Belgian miner Jean-Nicolas Perlot commented, "From that moment, everything changed! Farewell to the peaceful life of the placers! . . . People worked less and spent more; illnesses were more frequent, more numerous, more deadly" (p. 169).

The demographic upheaval of the gold rush and the successful exclusion of ethnic Mexicans from the diggings ushered in a new era of Anglo dominance of California. Anglos became the overwhelming majority, sup-

planting the Californios virtually overnight in most of the state, even the southern portions within a few decades. In New Mexico, in contrast, U.S. conquest did not lead to such an immediate and total population turnover. Here Anglo-Americans remained a small but powerful minority and of necessity made more accommodations with Hispanic settlers. Deena González's study of the women of Santa Fe in the nineteenth century, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820–1880*, stresses the gendered nature of U.S. conquest. Whereas Susan Johnson stresses in *Roaring Camp* how ordinary people found new, if constrained, opportunities in the swirl of the U.S. incorporation of California, González focuses on struggle and conflict. Conquest had disastrous results for "Spanish-Mexican" women: "Conquest and colonization impoverished the majority of residents of Santa Fe and perhaps much of the New Mexican North. It disempowered women, who had previously exercised certain rights guaranteed by Spanish law" (p. 3). Moreover, the consistent denigration of ethnic Mexican women by U.S. government officials and travelers "helped to legitimize the Euro-Americans' conquest of the region" (p. 56). Yet these women consistently resisted such colonization, González argues: "Spanish-Mexican women . . . refused its basic premise, which aimed at integrating them, at its lowest rungs, into a nineteenth-century economy and society that was being transplanted from the midwestern and eastern United States" (p. 7).

González makes her case by depicting the rights that women established for themselves under Spanish and Mexican rule, analyzing postconquest efforts to undermine such rights, and examining court cases and wills to unearth a pattern of sustained resistance. Before the U.S. conquest, women had often succeeded in using the legal system to protect their right to retain their own family names, to engage in entrepreneurial activities such as renting rooms, and to inherit and pass along property. To prevail, they needed to use the language of sexualized honor and respectability to advance their cases, often going to great lengths to defer to their husbands or fathers as witnesses. Not all did, however. A judge reported that the wife in one divorce case refused to respond to charges of adultery, declaring that "it was her ass, she controlled it, and she would give it to whomever she wanted" (p. 28). But as González artfully shows, women also manipulated patriarchy to serve their own ends. They continued to employ this strategy after the conquest of New Mexico, struggling to continue entrepreneurship and to pass along their property. The making of wills takes on particular salience in González's argument that women's wills became "the primary means of preserving inheritances and of keeping property out of the prying hands of Euro-Americans . . . ; by extension, they also occupied a central place in the struggles to control the market, the economy, and the town in general. . . . [M]any women fought colonization through will-making—through the artful composition of final wishes carefully considered" (pp. 95–96).

Gonzalez's focus on conflict and resistance in *Refusing the Favor* leads her to dismiss the idea that mixed Anglo-Mexican marriages represented some sort of accommodation between newly arrived Anglos and elements of Santa Fe's Mexican society. Other scholars have argued that such mixed marriages often helped integrate previously distinct societies by creating shared economic interests and even new categories of in-between or racially "mixed" peoples. Albert Hurtado's analysis of marriages between Californias and Anglos exemplifies this approach. Such marriages can offer benefits to both partners and their families: social standing, access to land and kinship networks for newcomers, and political and economic entrée into the colonizing society for the established resident. These unions are agents of colonization in enhancing the colonizers' dominance (particularly in the economic realm), but they also help create a more secure niche for the colonized. In the U.S. Southwest after the Mexican-American War, areas where mixed-marriage families dominated local politics became less racially exclusive or segregated than regions where Anglos and Mexicans kept a greater distance. These mixed families, the heart of what David Montejano has termed "the peace structure," helped at the same time to suppress radical and irredentist movements by more marginalized ethnic Mexicans.³

González attacks such interpretations, arguing that these marriages must be viewed in the light of "the acrimonious cultural and economic context within which Spanish-Mexican women forged relationships with Euro-American men" (p. 72). Although about half of the Euro-American men in Santa Fe lived with Spanish-Mexican women by 1850, these unions included only several hundred of some four thousand Spanish-Mexican women and were therefore less significant from the perspective of Spanish-Mexican residents (p. 74). This argument is not persuasive, however, because it conflates numbers with power and treats all Spanish-Mexicans as an undifferentiated mass constantly resisting the colonialism that marginalized all of them equally.

González's interpretation of mixed marriages reflects her overall emphasis in *Refusing the Favor* on how women fit into large structures of domination and conflict. Unlike Hurtado and Johnson, she is not interested in analyzing the agency and accommodation of individuals: "To view their choices or decisions as self-conscious action as mere adaptation, or . . . as an adoption of 'something new,' implies complicity or motive based on knowledge, implies—in ways consistent with liberalism—an egalitarian lineup of

3. See John Mack Faragher, "The Custom of the Country: Cross-Cultural Marriage in the Far Western Fur Trade," in *Western Women: Their Lands, Their Lives*, edited by Lillian Schlissel, Vicki Ruiz, and Janice Monk (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 199–215; Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": *Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670–1870* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Watson and Dwyer, 1980); and David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

choices. . . . This was certainly not the case" (p. 110). In the end, however, González is not very successful in attempting to demonstrate the perpetual resistance of Spanish-Mexican women. Where Hurtado and Johnson gracefully weave stories and case studies into a theoretical framework, González jumps unpredictably from anecdote to theoretical rumination and back again. It is often difficult to recognize the grounds for reading legal disputes and inheritance decisions as evidence of a subaltern anti-colonial consciousness. Indeed, Gonzalez's conclusion seems to dismiss the very concept of historical evidence: "Evidence often has little to do with the concepts and the language used because it is often presented as an afterthought and can be stacked up to support many arguments, for historians and non-historians alike" (p. 116).

Linda Gordon's *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* successfully demonstrates the intersection of women, gender, and racial hierarchies in the borderlands. A dramatic set of events forms the basis of her book, in which brief detailed narrations are interspersed with longer analytic chapters. In September 1904, the Sisters of Charity in New York City took forty mostly Irish orphan children on a long train ride to the Arizona-Mexico border towns of Clifton and Morenci to be adopted by Catholic families. But these families were also Mexican, and the other townspeople refused to stand by and let them take "white children" into their homes. Anglo women convinced their husbands to take action, which they soon did with great vigor. A mob surrounded the nuns' hotel, threatening to tar and feather the sisters, while another posse "collected" the orphans already given to their adoptive families and then passed them out among the women whose protests had inaugurated the vigilantism. The frightened nuns returned to New York City with the remaining children and sued one of the abductors in an Arizona court. The court ruled against the Sisters, finding that it was in the best interests of the children to be placed with "American families." Two years later, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal, incorporating in its decision the vigilantes' claim that "the child in question is a white, caucasian child . . . abandoned . . . to the keeping of a Mexican Indian . . . by reason of his race, mode of living, habits and education, unfit to have the custody, care, and education of the child" (p. 296).

As Gordon shows, to have allowed "Mexican Indians" to adopt "white children" would have made a mockery of the towns' and the country's racial order. The children thus came to embody deeply held political beliefs (one cannot help but think of the struggle over Elián González when reading this book). In fact, the kidnapping became a key episode in the creation of the racial order in Arizona. Before the kidnapping, society in Clifton and Morenci contained various gradations of race, with wealthy Anglos occupying the pinnacle of whiteness, various European ethnic groups and less prominent Anglos in middling positions, and ethnic Mexican mineworkers at the bottom. The clash over the orphans helped reduce this system to a

cruder white-nonwhite binary. Gordon narrates the orphans' story in enormous detail to show the key role played by women in creating this clear racial divide:

When segregation was constructed in the first decades of this century, Anglo women left their mark on the system. Sharing with Anglo men a material interest in a colonial labor market, which provided them with cheap domestic servants, but often opposing these same men's raucous cultural taste, the women's influence introduced sexual, familial, and domestic standards of respectability as demarcators of status. It was women who fully spliced class status to whiteness. They stigmatized intermarriage and reduced its incidence, in a kind of gender contest by which they challenged Anglo men's patriarchal colonial privilege to marry and make "white" their Mexican wives. They made *mestizaje* increasingly an embarrassment. (P. 183)

At the same time, ethnic Mexican women also exercised their own agency. It was their requests for adoptive children that prompted the sisters to send the orphans, with such disastrous consequences.

The persuasiveness of *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* testifies to the power of narrative history, of telling a coherent and focused story to illustrate broader historical developments and trajectories. The demands of a narrative, however, can require historians to speculate about the motives of their characters. The women of Clifton and Morenci left few records explaining their actions or revealing their thoughts about the dispute over the orphans. Gordon is better able to connect the actions of the nuns and the towns' Anglo women to notions of racial identity than she does with Mexican women. Consider this key portion of her speculation about the motives of the would-be adoptive mothers:

There was the special yearning for a light child, a yearning they did not know they had—or actually did not have—until one was offered. Appreciation of lightness had been part of their Mexican culture. As girls they longed to be lighter themselves; as mothers they longed for lighter babies. Lightness was not mere aesthetic prejudice but stood, however, subconsciously, for material hopes: for prosperity, health, security, status . . . now in Clifton-Morenci light had become "white," not a description, but a rank, a caste. Marrying into whiteness was no longer a realistic option, but adopting whiteness—who knew what it might lead to? Such a child might go to school, might learn perfect English, might marry a white man or earn a white man's wages. (P. 148)

Perhaps this is true, but there is no persuasive evidence that it is. Most Latin Americanists might find it more likely that ideas about Catholicism and Hispanic (as compared with native) culture impelled Mexican women to seek the adoption of Irish Catholic orphans in New York City.

The publication of recently recovered works of Jovita González de Mireles represents similar efforts to tell stories about the role of women and gender roles in creating and transforming borderlands society. Jovita González used the medium of historical fiction to give her readers an insider's perspective on social change in south Texas. Although at times her novels

almost eerily anticipated contemporary scholarly concerns with gender and borderlands racial formations, these works were written nearly seventy years ago. González was born in 1903 outside Roma, Texas, on her grandparents' ranch. A member of the fifth generation of a Spanish-Mexican landed family, she was educated in Roma and San Antonio, earning a master's degree under the direction of Eugene Barker at the University of Texas at Austin. In her young adulthood, González became as prominent an academic figure as a Mexican American woman of her era could realistically hope to be. She served as president of the influential Texas Folklore Society in 1931–1932, published numerous articles on folklore and racial relations in south Texas, coauthored several Spanish-language textbooks with her husband, and labored for years on novels never to be published in her lifetime. Although little remembered today, her 1930 thesis greatly influenced the work of later scholars. In this work (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation), González showed that elite ethnic Mexicans in the lower border region of Texas continued to own large holdings and wield substantial political power well into the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, agricultural development, the influx of large numbers of Anglos, and the rise of numerous towns with their Mexican American middle class shattered the old patriarchal world of the wealthy ethnic Mexican ranchers.⁴

Caballero, *a Historical Novel* and *Dew on the Thorn* reveal the internal turmoil in these households during periods when the distinctive pattern of race relations in south Texas underwent several transformations. On the surface, these novels might strike many contemporary readers as simple, colorful folklore with their stylized portrayals of fierce *vaqueros*, submissive *peones*, and amorous daughters of *hacendados*. But their plots suggest that the choices that women consciously made to escape or mitigate patriarchal control helped to create new racial and social orders.

Caballero examines the struggles of ethnic Mexican ranchers during and after the U.S. military occupation of south Texas from 1845 to 1848. In this novel, the male *rancheros* vow to resist Anglo intruders to the death, but their daughters and sisters find much to admire about arriving Anglo men. Several of the main female characters defy their menfolk by betrothing themselves to Anglo newcomers. These unions become the glue for a new society in which both elite Anglos and ethnic Mexicans, thanks to the initiative of women, will fuse their economic and political power.

If the tone of the novel occasionally seems to mourn the eclipse of the proud patriarchs, it also seems to celebrate the resulting personal freedom. A major subplot of *Caballero* revolves around the homoerotic friendship between Luis Gonzaga de Mendoza y Soría, second son of a prominent ranching family, and Anglo artist Captain Devlin. Although Luis feels com-

4. Jovita González, "Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties," M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1930; and Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 36, 79, 155, 248.

pelled by family loyalty and the intransigence of his father to scorn Devlin, the doctor is the only person he has met who recognizes and encourages his artistic talent. Luis considers going to the East Coast with Devlin to study art: "Their hands were locked and tears splashed down Luis Gonzaga's cheeks and onto the hands. They were neither Mexican nor Anglo Saxon but artists. . . . The thought of what could so easily be and was so impossible, the prospect of a lifetime of work on the ranch so contrary to his inclinations, the knowledge that his one understanding friend would soon be gone, was too much for the sensitive boy. He could not bear it here, feared he could not control the unmanly tears" (p. 156). Luis's decision to leave the ranch and head east enrages his father. In the ensuing confrontation, Luis "saw, clearly, that the real issue was not his consorting with an American, or even his leaving; the issue was a test of the mastership of his father over his family" (p. 197). The father fails this test, dying with a handful of his ranch's earth in his grasp as his children make an honorable peace with their conquerors.

Dew on the Thorn follows similar elite ranching families (which now include Anglos) several generations later, in the first decade of the twentieth century. Here the primary conflict occurs between the more racially accommodating order that these families lead and the segregation-minded Anglos brought by the railroad and the region's consequent economic integration with the rest of the United States. Early on, the narrative matter-of-factly attributes peace and stability to the now-old pattern of intermarriage: "Interracial peace returned. In the towns, Americans, Germans, and French intermarried with the descendants of the old Mexican families, and Spanish became again the language of society" (p. 11).

The new arrivals, however, fail to appreciate this harmonious order. Fernando Olivares, son of one of the mixed families, learns this lesson when he begins clerking in a Corpus Christi store: "Great was his surprise at the treatment he received in the American town. Had he received a slap on the face he would not have felt worse. The fact that his family had been in the country for five generations meant nothing to these Americans whom he had come so prepared to like. The fact that his grandfather was Mr. John Preston from Virginia made no difference to them. In their eyes he was just a Mexican, and a Mexican was something to be treated as an inferior being" (p. 151). Fernando fights back, using his education, financial success, and family ties to become a powerful political leader. Rather than rejecting U.S. conquest wholesale, as did his Mexican grandfather, he urges ethnic Mexicans "to exercise their rights as American citizens," telling them, "It is our duty to learn English . . . , to send our children to American schools. Not that we are ashamed of our Mexican traditions, but because this will make us know how to protect ourselves against them" (p. 152). Even as his family's old power base slips away from them as their workers leave the ranch for better

wages paid by Anglo farmers, Fernando knows that he has found a new way to fight for his people.

Jovita González's novels benefit from the liberties of historical fiction to do what historians may not necessarily be able to do: to recover the family lives of rancheros coming to terms with life in the United States. But even if historians labor under greater constraints of evidence, the richness and breadth of the works reviewed here testify to the usefulness of examining the most intimate matters. Sexual relations and gender roles simultaneously reflect personal identities, hopes, and critical targets for imperial, national, and racial projects. Telling their history thus shows how ordinary people by turns have advanced, undermined, or attempted to ignore the ambitions of those who have sought to control the borderlands.