Engendering the History of Alta California, 1769–1848

Gender, Sexuality, and the Family

Antonia I. Castañeda

The frontier is a liminal zone... its subjects, interstitial beings. ... For more than two centuries the North was a society organized for warfare.

Ana María Alonso

From 1769, when the first entrada (incursion) of soldiers and priests arrived in California to extend Spanish colonial hegemony to the farthest reaches of the northern frontier, women and girls were the target of sexual violence and brutal attacks. In the San Gabriel region, for example, soldiers on horseback swooped into villages, chased, lassoed, raped, beat, and sometimes killed women. As had occurred in successive incursions into new territory since the fifteenth century, sexual aggression against native women was among the first recorded acts of Spanish colonial domination in Alta California. This political violence effected on the bodies of women made colonial California a land of endemic warfare.

This essay examines the gendered and sexualized construction of the colonial order and relations of power in Alta California from 1769 to 1848 as this land passed from Spanish to Mexican to Euro-American rule. Using gender and sexuality as categories of analysis, it explores how women articulated their power, subjectivity, and identity in the militarized colonial order reigning on this remote outpost. In this study, gender denotes the social construction of masculinity, as well as of femininity—and thus the social construction of distinctions between male and female. Gender is also a principal realm for the production of more general effects of power and meaning. Thus, gender is here interpreted as a relational dimension of colonialism and as one aspect of an imperial power matrix within which gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture operate. This matrix is brought to bear in recent studies on gender and colo-
A young Huchnom woman with the characteristic facial tattooing of her people. Although knowledge of pre-Hispanic Indian gender and sexuality systems is slender, it is generally thought that, despite male dominance in most spheres, a more open and flexible relation existed between the sexes than obtained in European society. Among the Huchnom, whose lands lay along the South Fork of the Eel River, it was the custom for newly married couples to settle with the bride’s relations, one of several exceptions to the otherwise patrilocal practice of California Indians. From Stephen Powers, Tribes of California (Washington, 1877).Courtesy California Historical Society, FN-30507.

Colonialism on the northern frontiers of New Spain by historian Ramón Gutiérrez and anthropologist Ana María Alonso, who examine the ideology of honor in order to theorize and interpret constructions of masculinity and femininity within the power relations of colonialism.3

This chapter examines how indigenous and mestiza women (Indo-mestiza and Afro-mestiza) became subjects of colonial domination in California. It draws on studies that view gender and sexuality as dimensions of subjectivity that are both an “effect of power and a technology of rule,” and that analyze colonial domination in relation to the construction of subjectivities—meaning forms of personhood, power, and social positioning. It also focuses on female agency, that is, the ways in which women manipulated circumstances and used cultural, spiritual, religious, and legal actions to resist patriarchal domination.4

Recent interdisciplinary works center women and other subordinated (subaltern) groups as subjects of history and use gender and sexuality as categories of analysis to examine broad historical processes. This scholarship seeks to find and analyze the subalterns’ voices, agency, and identities in the fissures and spaces, the interstices, the hidden, masked meanings of events and documents.5 Using gender and sexuality to analyze resistance strategies within larger structures and processes, these studies explore women’s power to reshape and refabricate their social identity—to fashion their own response, their own experience, and their own histories.
Gender, Sexuality, and Opposing Ideologies

Little is known about native systems of gender and sexuality in California at the time of the Spanish invasion. Nevertheless, it is clear that indigenous practices were antithetical to a patriarchal ideology in which gender hierarchy, male domination, and heterosexuality were the exclusive organizing principles of desire, sexuality, marriage, and the family. In the European order, until passage of the Bourbon Reforms in the late eighteenth century, Roman Catholic ideology and canon law, which conceptualized the body as base and vile, imposed a regime of sexual repression that tied sexuality to morality. While canon law regulated marriage and the sociosexual life, of the physical body, civil law regulated the body politic and controlled family law, reinforcing inheritance and property rights and strengthening the patriarchal family. In this ideology, woman was conceptualized in opposition to, and as the possession of, man. Woman's reproductive capacity, as the vehicle for the production of legitimate heirs and the transference of private property, was defined as the single most important source of her value. Spanish law defined women as sexual beings and delineated their sexual lives through the institution of indissoluble, monogamous marriage. And although canon law upheld the principle that marriage required the consent of both parties, that principle was not always adhered to.

Sexual intercourse, in theory, was confined to marriage, a sacrament intended for the procreation of children, for companionship, and for the containment of lust. Woman's sexuality had to be controlled through virginity before monogamous marriage and fidelity after in order to ensure legitimate transference of the patrimony. By regularizing inheritance of status and property, marriage institutionalized the legal exchange of women's bodies. The family, the sociopolitical organization within which these transactions occurred, reproduced the hierarchical, male-dominated social order. The Spanish cultural idiom of honor—the ideology of personal subordination to familial concerns—held the larger patriarchal edifice together at the fundamental unit of the family and family relationships.

Gender was a key dimension of honor, which defined the value accorded to both the individual person (personhood) and the family. Thus, ideal social conduct was defined by gender and differed according to appropriate male and female qualities and roles. Women's honor centered on their sexuality, and on their own and their family's control of it. Men's honor and ideal conduct centered on their conquest and domination of others, including women, as well as on protection, which included protecting the honor (sexual reputation) of females in the family. These gendered qualities of honor maintained the patrimony and perpetuated an honored image of the self and family across time. The result was extreme sexual oppression of women and a double standard of sexual behavior. Individuals possessed individual honor, and families possessed collective honor.
A page dated April 1781 from the San Carlos Borromeo “First Book of Matrimony,” in which Fray Junípero Serra recorded marriages of neophytes, as well as of Spanish soldiers, performed in the mission church. The ceremony of Christian marriage, with its attendant imperatives of appropriate social and sexual relations between men and women, was part of the complex pattern of Hispanic life that the Franciscans imposed on the California Indians, thereby radically reshaping traditional native society. Courtesy California Historical Society/Title Insurance and Trust Photo Collection, University of Southern California.
Systems of gender and sexuality among indigenous peoples, in contrast, generally conceptualized females and males as complementary, not opposed, principles. Woman was not a derivative of man, sexuality was not repressed, and both gender and sexual systems were relatively fluid. With variations, native systems included gender parallelism, matriarchal sociopolitical organization, and matrilineal forms of reckoning and descent. Within these diverse cultures, women's power and authority could derive from one or more elements: the culture's basic principle of individual autonomy that structured political relationships, including those between men and women; women's important productive or reproductive role in the economy; and the authority accorded women by their bearing and raising of children. Further, women's power and authority were integral to, and also derived from, the tribe's core religious and spiritual beliefs, values, and traditions, which generally accorded women and men equivalent value, power, and range of practices.

As part of the natural world, sexuality, for many indigenous people, was related to the sacred and, as such, was central to their religious and cosmic order. Sexuality was celebrated by women and men in song, dance, and other ritual observances to awaken the earth's fertility and ensure that they were blessed with fecundity. Accepted practices extended to premarital sexual activity, polygamy, polyandry, homosexuality, transvestitism, same-sex marriage, and ritual sexual practices. Divorce was easily attainable, and, under particular conditions, abortion and infanticide were practiced.

Woman—the female principle—was a pivotal force in American cosmologies and worldviews. Woman, whether in the form of Grandmother, Thought Woman, or another female being, was at the center of the originating principle that brought the people into being and sustained them. On arriving in California in 1769, Europeans confronted the reality of Amerindian societies in which women not only controlled their own resources, sexuality, and reproductive processes, but also held religious, political, economic, and sometimes, military power. The colonial church and state sought to eradicate native traditions that were centered on and controlled by women. In California, the Franciscan mission system was the principal vehicle for efforts to extirpate native systems of gender and sexuality and hence of women's resistance to them.

In the confessional, priests queried both women and men about their sexual lives and activities and meted out punishments. While prohibitions against fornication, adultery, masturbation, sodomy, incest, bestiality, and coitus interruptus applied to all, abortion and infanticide—violations of the Fifth Commandment, which condemned killing—applied specifically to women and were punished harshly. Hugo Reid writes that the priests at Mission San Gabriel attributed all miscarriages to infanticide and that Gabrielino women were punished by “shaving the head, flogging for fifteen subsequent days, [wearing] iron on the feet for three months, and having to appear every Sunday in church, on the steps leading up the
altar, with a hideous painted wooden child [a *monigote*] in her arms” representing the dead infant. ¹²

The imperative to control and remake native sexuality, in particular to control women’s procreation, was driven as much by material interest as by doctrinal issues. California needed a growing Hispanicized Indian population as both a source of labor and as a defense against foreign invasion, and thus missionaries sometimes took extraordinary measures to assure reproduction. Father Olbes at Mission Santa Cruz ordered an infertile couple to have sexual intercourse in his presence because he did not believe they could not have children. The couple refused, but Olbes forcibly inspected the man’s penis to learn “whether or not it was in good order” and tried to inspect the woman’s genitalia. ¹³ She refused, fought with him, and tried to bite him. Olbes ordered that she be tied by the hands, and given fifty lashes, shackled, and locked up in the *monjero* (women’s dormitory). He then had a *monigote* made and commanded that she “treat the doll as though it were a child and carry it in the presence of everyone for nine days.” While the woman was beaten and her sexuality demeaned, the husband, who had been intimate with another woman, was ridiculed and humiliated. A set of cow horns was tied to his head with leather thongs, thereby converting him into a cuckold, and he was herded to daily Mass in cow horns and fetters.

Franciscan priests also prohibited initiation ceremonies, dances, and songs in the mission system. They sought to destroy the ideological, moral, and ethical systems that defined native life. They demonized noncomplying women, especially those who resisted openly, as witches. Indeed, Ramón Gutiérrez argues that, in the northern borderlands of New Spain, “One can interpret the whole history of the persecution of Indian women as witches . . . as a struggle over [these] competing ways of defining the body and of regulating procreation as the church endeavored to constrain the expression of desire within boundaries that clerics defined proper and acceptable.” ¹⁴

**NATIVE WOMEN, POWER, AND RESISTANCE**

No trayaba armas . . . vino para animarlos a que tubieran corazón para pelear. (She was unarmed . . . she came to animate their will to fight.)

—Toypurina, “Ynterrogatorio de la india gentil” (1785)

Some indigenous women countered the everyday violence inflicted upon them with gender-centered strategies that authorized them to speak, to act, to lead, and to empower others. They fought the ideological power of the colonial church and state with powerful ideologies that vested women with power and authority over their own sexuality.

Toypurina, the medicine woman of the Japchavit *ranchería*, in the vicinity of Mission San Gabriel, used her power as a wise woman in an attempt to rid her people of
the priests and soldiers. On October 25, 1785, Toypurina and three Gabrielino men led eight villages in an attack against the priests and soldiers of the mission. Toypurina, who had been about ten years old when the villages from the coast and the nearby mountains had attacked the mission some thirteen years earlier, used her influence as a medicine woman to recruit six of the eight villages that joined the 1785 battle.

At San Gabriel, the soldiers got wind of the attack and, lying in wait, captured Toypurina, her three companions, and twenty other warriors. Governor Pedro Fages convicted the four leaders and sentenced them to prisón segura in the missions. After a three-year imprisonment at San Gabriel, Toypurina was exiled north to Mission San Carlos Borromeo in 1788. The twenty warriors captured with her were sentenced to between twenty and twenty-five lashes plus time already served. This punishment was levied as much for following the leadership of a woman as for rebelling against Spanish domination. On sentencing them, Fages stated that their public whippings were “to serve as a warning to all,” for he would “admonish them about their ingratitude, underscoring their perversity, and unmasking the deceit and tricks by which they allowed themselves to be dominated by the aforesaid woman” (emphasis added).

Toypurina’s power and influence derived from a non-Western religious-political ideological system of power in which women were central to the ritual and spiritual life of the tribe. Neither the source of Toypurina’s religious-political power nor the threat she posed to the colonialist project in Alta California was lost on Fages, who, refusing to acknowledge her political power, constructed her instead as a sorceress. In his account, Fages sought to erase Toypurina’s actual identity and to fabricate an identity consistent with colonialist gender values and ideologies.

Archival records show that native women continued to resist colonial domination with a range of actions and activities, including religious-political movements that vested power in a female deity and placed the health and well-being of the community in the hands of a female visionary. In 1801, at the height of an epidemic ravaging the Chumash in the missions and the rancherías, a woman at Mission Santa Barbara launched a clandestine, large-scale revitalization movement. Drawing her authority from visions and revelations from Chupu, the Chumash earth goddess, this neophyte woman—who remains unnamed in the documents—called for a return to the worship of Chupu, who told her that “The pagan Indians were to die if they were baptized and that the same fate would befall the Christian Indians who would not give alms to [her] and who refused to wash their heads with a certain water.” Her revelation “spread immediately through all the houses of the mission. Almost all the neophytes, the alcaldes included, went to the house of the visionary to present beads and seeds and to go through the rite of renouncing Christianity.”

Precisely because historical documents portray both Toypurina and the Chumash visionary of 1801 as “witches and sorceresses,” we need to understand witchcraft within gendered relations of power in the Spanish/European world in general and
within gendered relations of power and subordination under conditions of colonialism in particular. Ostensibly, all women in colonial Mexico and Latin America, like their counterparts throughout the Christian world, were suspected of being witches on the basis of gender, but women of colonized groups were suspect on multiple grounds. Indian women, African-origin women, and racially mixed women—whether Indo-mestiza or Afro-mestiza—were suspect by virtue of being female, by virtue of deriving from non-Christian, or “diabolic,” religions and cultures, and by virtue of being colonized or enslaved peoples who might rebel and use their alleged magical power at any moment. Thus, in the Christian imperialist gaze, non-Christian women and their mestiza daughters were sexualized, racialized, and demonized for the ostensibly religious crime of witchcraft, although they were often tried in secular courts, where witchcraft was treated as a political crime.

Yet, while ecclesiastical and civil officials dismissed, discredited, exiled, or sometimes put to death nonwhite women charged with witchcraft, women themselves used witchcraft as a means of subverting the sociosexual order sanctioned by religion and enshrined in the colonial honor code as an ethical system. Ruth Behar argues that women used sexualized magic to control men and subvert the male order by symbolically using their own bodies and bodily fluids as a source of power over men. Accordingly, sexual witchcraft included the use of menstrual blood, wash water, pubic hair, and ensorcelled food to attract, tame, or tie men into submission or, sometimes, to harm or kill a physically abusive or unfaithful husband or lover. In the realm of sexualized magic, women developed a rich symbolic language and actions that were as violent as men’s beating of wives. Women’s actions within this spiritual domain represented a form of power.

If colonizing males thought of Indian women’s bodies, both symbolically and materially, as a means to territorial and political conquest, women constructed and used their bodies, both symbolically and materially, as instruments of resistance and subversion of colonial domination. Toypurina and the Chumash visionary placed their bodies in the line of fire and organized and led others to do likewise. Other women resisted in less visible, day-to-day practices: they poisoned the priests’ food, practiced fugitivism, worshipped their own deities, had visions that others believed and followed, performed prohibited dances and rituals, refused to abide by patriarchal sexual norms, and continued to participate in armed revolts and rebellions against the missions, soldiers, and ranchos. Participants cited the priests’ cruelty and repression of traditional ceremonies and sexual practices among primary reasons for the attacks on the missions, for the assassination of the friar Andrés Quintana at Mission Santa Cruz in 1812, and for the great Chumash levantamiento of 1824.

Secularization of the missions after 1834 ended the systematic, day-to-day institutional assault on native peoples’ sexuality. It did not, however, end the sexual violence against indigenous women in the ensuing eras of Mexican and Euro-American
rule. Although Albert Hurtado examines the violence toward native women in the second half of the nineteenth century and initiates an important discussion of Indian survival, the nature of Amerindian women's resistance and strategies of survival in the post-mission era remains largely uncharted terrain.21

That colonialism for all its brutal technologies and distorted narratives, could not completely destroy native women's historical autonomy is something native peoples have always known, but scholarly researchers are just beginning to learn.22 Native oral traditions have preserved the histories, telling and retelling women's identities and remembering across time, space, and generations. Through oral and visual traditions, and other means of communicating counter-histories, native women's power, authority, and knowledge have remained part of their peoples' collective memory, historical reality, and daily struggles of "being in a state of war for five hundred years."23

Certainly ideologies of resistance and social memory, as the recent wealth of Native American literature reveals, center women as pivotal figures in historical and contemporary resistance in their peoples' collective memory. Thus, Vera Rocha, the contemporary hereditary chief of the Gabrielinos, received the story of Toypurina and the Gabrielinos as a very young girl from her great-grandmother, who received it from her mother.24 Rocha, in turn, transmitted the story to her children and grandchildren and, more recently, to the world in general in the form of a public monument—a prayer mound dedicated to Toypurina developed in conjunction with Chicana artist Judith F. Baca. Such histories remain archived in tribal, family, and individual memory, as well as in other texts—some written, most not.

The effort to reconstruct the historical agency of Amerindian women is inseparable from the effort to reconstruct the autonomy of the racially and culturally mixed women who, with their families, were recruited by the colonial state to colonize Alta California five years after the initial arrival of soldiers and missionaries in 1769. The second part of this chapter examines mestiza women's agency, and the record they left of it, within the contradictory roles they occupied as both dominated and dominating native subjects.

**REPRODUCING THE COLONY: GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE FAMILY IN ALTA CALIFORNIA**

Settlers must be men of the soil, tillers of the field, accompanied by their families . . . of upright character . . . likely to set a good example to the heathen.

—Teodoro de Croix, 1781, quoted in *Southern California Quarterly* 15, 1931

In Spain's New World empire, the central role of the conjugal family in consolidating the conquest of new territory was rooted in methods initially developed during
the wars of the reconquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims. First formulated in the charters of medieval Spanish towns, the role of the family in imposing Spanish hegemony was transplanted to the Americas in the form of social legislation and colonization policies such as the policy of domestic unity, or unity of residence. Backed by royal decrees and a system of economic and political rewards and punishments, this policy was designed to solidify the development of the institution of Christian marriage and the patriarchal family and to reproduce Spanish-Catholic civilization in the colonies.

The arrival of single soldiers and priests in California in 1769 reproduced socio-sexual conditions similar to those of Spain’s earlier sixteenth-century conquests elsewhere. By 1772, fearing that the California settlements were on the verge of collapse and acknowledging the slow rate of local Amerindian conversions, Junípero Serra argued that the survival of the colony required the presence of “Spanish,” meaning Hispanicized, women and families. Thus, racially mixed soldier and settler families were recruited, outfitted, subsidized, and transported by the colonial state to populate Alta California and to reproduce Christian family life and society. Attracting families to the remote military outpost, however, was no easy matter. Serra first promoted intermarriage between soldiers and newly Christianized native women in California as a way to establish Catholic family life, to foster alliances between the soldiers and the Indians, and to curb the soldiers’ sexual attacks against native women. To promote these families, Serra recommended that soldiers who married indigenous “daughters of the land” be rewarded with three kinds of bounty: a horse, farm animals, and land.

In 1773, five newly converted Rumsien women married Catalán and mestizo soldiers at the Mission San Carlos de Borromeo, three married at San Luis Obispo, and three married at San Antonio de Padua. California’s first mestizo families derived from these and similar unions at the presidios and missions. However, the intermarriage of soldiers with native women could neither meet the immediate need for families to populate the colony nor fulfill the civilizing mission assigned to sturdy Spanish families. To that end, between 1774 and 1781, colonial officials sent captains Fernando Rivera y Moncada and Juan Bautista de Anza on three modestly successful expeditions to recruit and bring to Alta California soldier, settler, and artisan gente de razón (Hispanicized) families from the northern provinces of Sonora-Sinaloa and Guadalajara. Subsequent attempts to recruit more families were decidedly unsuccessful, however. The Yuma rebellion of 1781, which closed the land route from Sonora, effectively arrested overland migration, and travel by sea was always perilous. During the decades of the 1780s and 1790s, colonial efforts to sentence convicts to California in lieu of other punishment and to bring settlers from Guadalajara also met with little success. Although a handful of families came with supply ships, most other new settlers were men.
The Wife of a Monterey Soldier, drawn in 1791 by the Spanish expeditionary artist José Cardero, is the earliest known image of a Hispanic woman in California. Efforts to recruit single women from Mexico met with little success throughout the colonial period, and most soldiers who married on the California frontier took Indian brides. Courtesy Museo Naval, Madrid. Photograph courtesy Iris Engstrand.
Governor Diego de Borica repeatedly sought to recruit single women as marriage, and thus sexual, partners for these men. However, viceregal authorities were unable to meet Borica's call in 1794 or his requests in 1798, first for "young healthy maids" (doncellas) and then simply for 100 women. Instead, in 1800, with the help of the church, colonial officials shipped nineteen niñas y niños de cuna (foundlings)—ten girls and nine boys—to Alta California, where, according to Apolinaria Lorenzana, who arrived as a seven-year-old, they were "distributed like puppies" to various families. With the exception of Apolinaria Lorenzana, all of the young women eventually married, though not without resistance.

The foundlings of 1800 were part of the last government-sponsored effort to recruit or promote colonizing families until the era of Mexican rule, when new invaders—Europeans and Euro-Americans—began arriving in California. Mexico responded by sending the Hijar-Padrés expedition of 1834, which arrived with forty-two families, including fifty children, plus fifty-five single men and thirteen single women. Instead of soldiers, this expedition was comprised of teachers, artisans, farmers, and their families. By this time, "Anglos" from the United States had begun to intermarry with Californio "daughters of the land," descendants of California's first soldier-settler families.

Despite the scarcity of hispanas despite the church's promotion of intermarriage between soldiers and Christianized Indian women, despite the colonists' own racially mixed backgrounds, and despite the blurring of racial and ethnic distinctions, rates of intermarriage between the soldier-settler population and Amerindians in the Monterey area, where I have completed the research, were high only in the initial period. Between 1773 and 1778, 37 percent of the soldier-settler marriages were with Christianized Amerindian women. For the entire colonial period, however, only 15 percent of all marriages in Monterey were interracial. As elsewhere in the Spanish colonial world, conquering and colonizing men in California seldom formalized their sexual relations with Amerindian women after the early stages of conquest, when there were fewer alternative mates and intermarriage held particular economic, political, and military dividends. To reproduce the colony in Alta California, women's race and ethnicity mattered as much as their procreative capacities.

The betrothal and marriage of María Antonia Isabela de Lugo to Ygnacio Vicente Ferrer Vallejo illustrate the interrelation between race and contractual marriage. Lugo was betrothed to Vallejo, a soldier serving escort duty at Mission San Luis, on the day of her birth. The contract between Vallejo and Lugo's parents bound her to marry him when she reached menarche. On February 18, 1791, at the age of fourteen and a half, Lugo married Vallejo, by then forty years old and retired from military service. Vallejo had entered into a marriage contract with a family who, like himself, was classified as "Spanish" rather than as mestizo, mulato, coyote, pardo, or any other mixed-blood designation. Once married, he applied for an official decree of legitimidad
y limpieza de sangre (legitimacy and purity of blood) for the Vallejo name. In 1806, after fifteen years of marriage, the family received the decree, which certified that the Vallejo bloodline was untainted by Jewish, African, or any other non-Christian blood. Henceforth, the Lugo-Vallejo family, two of whose daughters married Euro-Americans while a third married a Frenchman, rested their prominence and high social standing, in good part, on their officially certified purity of blood. Thus, though historically, racially, and culturally related to indigenous and African peoples, the gente de razón soldiers and families articulated their own identity as “Californios”

During the Mexican era, after 1821, an expansionist North American neighbor sent a new group of single, foreign males—Europeans and Euro-Americans—to California’s shores. Some came as individual wanderers, some as part of exploring expeditions, merchant capitalist ventures, or reconnaissance missions. Spain’s earlier economic and political reforms and Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821 established the basis for an expanding economy and related developments that affected marriage and family life in California. The rise of private property in the form of large rancho grants, liberalization of colonization and trade policies, the secularization of the missions, the development of an agropastoral economy, and the increasing demand for imported goods established economic ties between Euro-American merchants and entrepreneurs and the landowning Californio families.

The intermarriage of daughters of the Californios to Euro-Americans and other foreigners who converted to Roman Catholicism and became naturalized Mexican citizens was, in many cases, the basis of these economic relationships. From the early 1820s to the end of Mexican rule in 1846, intermarriages were celebrated between the daughters of families who controlled the economic and political power in California and the Euro-Americans, who would join in the overthrow of Mexican rule. These unions, which generally gave the Anglo husbands landed wealth (sometimes in the form of women’s dowries, sometimes not) created still another group of mixed parentage. They also became the basis for the “old Spanish Californio family ancestry” claimed by Euro-American pioneers in narratives, memoirs, and histories of “Spanish California” published in the latter part of the nineteenth century, though often written in the wake of the U.S.-Mexican War and subsequent dispossession of the Californios.

These narratives, many of which were commissioned and collected in the 1870s and 1880s by Hubert Howe Bancroft for his multivolume History of California, became the primary source for the interpretations of gender and gender relations, women’s sexual and moral conduct, their racial characteristics, and the nature of the family that dominate subsequent histories of early California. Descriptions of the patriarchal Spanish-Mexican family, reproductive patterns, and family size abound in these nineteenth-century narratives of Euro-Americans and elite Californios, produced within the conflicting ideologies of the prewar and postwar eras. Becom-
One of a series of pen-and-ink drawings produced by Emanuel Wyttenbach under the supervision of William Heath Davis, *A California Wedding Party of 1845* conveys some of the color and pageantry associated with marriage among the great rancheros. A successful merchant, Davis himself married into a Californio family in 1847. His bride, the sixteen-year-old Maria Estudillo, inherited part of her father’s Rancho San Leandro, which added significantly to the couple’s estates, in a pattern typical of unions between *hijas del país* and Yankees since early provincial days. *Courtesy California State Library.*

The authoritative social and cultural histories, the texts described California women as “remarkably fecund” and frequently commented that families were exceptionally large, with women bearing twelve, fifteen, and twenty children. Women in California did, indeed, marry young, but the story is more complex. The study of marriage and the family in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century California is far from complete.

Examining lists of colonizing expeditions, marriage investigations (*diligencias*), marriage records, baptismal records, and population censuses for 1790 and 1834 for Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, historian Gloria Miranda has charted differences between and changes in the traditional, essentially military community of the presidio and the less economically stable, more flexible community of the pueblo. Numerous factors, including the stage of colonization, the paucity of eligible women, and the young age and frequent turnover of military personnel, contributed to the young age of first marriages in the presidios. They also contributed to the very low numbers of single women and to the continuation of arranged marriages among the *hispano* population. Widowhood was generally short-lived, and multiple serial mar-
riages were common for women. By custom, as well as because of frontier conditions, both sexes attained adulthood at a chronically tender age, and marriage registers document girls marrying between the ages of thirteen and sixteen and boys marrying between sixteen and seventeen. Across the span of the colonial period, however, the average marriage age in presidial society was sixteen to seventeen years for women and twenty-seven years for men. And although the population of the pueblo was more stable and permanent than in the presidio, the greater diversity of the population and economic instability of Los Angeles delayed the age of marriage there. The average age of marriage for women in Los Angeles was twenty years, while men married in their early thirties.

Similarly, Katharine Meyer Lockhart concluded that a steady increase in wealth, particularly among the pobladores whose occupation was ranching, was a distinctive, positive feature that affected the demographic pattern at the pueblo of San José. San José registered a steady two-year increase in women’s average age at marriage and a small decrease for men across three generations.

During the Mexican period, the rising social and economic complexity of town life, the marked emergence of an increasingly diversified population of foreigners, and the decline in the prestige of the military establishment as the presidio brought California closer to the marriage patterns that had emerged much earlier in Spain’s older frontiers. Thus, in the era after Mexican independence, marriage age increased slightly for women, the age gap between spouses decreased, and, with the immigration of foreigners, racial exogamy increased. Interestingly, the rate of intermarriage between Californio women and Euro-American and European men during the Mexican period in Monterey was 15 percent—the same rate of intermarriage recorded for Amerindian women and mestizo men during the colonial period.

Despite the young age at marriage, families in California were considerably smaller than commonly thought, although there were regional variations. While Miranda found a provincial average of slightly more than three children per family in 1790 and a homogeneous pattern of three to four children across the forty-four-year span between the 1790 and 1834 censuses, Lockhart found an average of seven children per family in San José. Although “for some Californians, having large families was considered a mark of status” and some members of affluent clans, including the De la Guerras, the Ortegas, and the Vallejos, had as many as thirteen and even nineteen children, this was not the norm in the province. Similarly, demographic studies of colonial New Mexico and Texas have shown that, contrary to common belief, large families were not the norm in either of these two colonies. Miranda and other scholars attribute small family size among married gente de razón couples to various factors, including high infant mortality rates, miscarriages, infertility, marital discord, the extended absence of husbands, and personal choice.

Miranda’s and Lockhart’s studies, and my own research in progress, reveal that age
at marriage and family size of the mestizo population in colonial California are consistent with patterns identified for the borderlands region writ large and for parts of colonial Mexico and Latin America.\textsuperscript{47} This was generally true for other patterns, including high incidence of female-headed households, concubinage, illegitimacy, adultery, and premarital sex. Across time, sexual patterns in California increasingly resembled the broader nineteenth-century postcolonial Mexican and Latin American world.\textsuperscript{48}

The meaning of these patterns, which challenge conventional notions of marriage and the patriarchal extended family, as well as standard analytic categories, has yet to be fully interpreted. Analytic and interpretive categories that explain the larger differences between colonials and European patterns as well as internal differentiation remain elusive, and, at this juncture, questions more than answers are at the forefront of scholarly discussion. Certainly part of the problem besetting the development of interpretive models remains rooted in the difficulty of reconstructing the lives of subaltern subjects from written sources that often ignore or distort their existence. The evidence historians have developed thus far, however, illustrates that the patriarchal family—ostensibly the norm in colonial California—was always a highly contested realm.

**CONTESTING FAMILIES:**

**WOMEN'S POWER, RESISTANCE, AND CONTRADICTIONS**

I am a woman and helpless . . . [but] they will not close the doors of my own honor and birth, which swing open in natural defense and protection of itself.

—Eulalia Callis, 1786

Though few women and men who colonized Alta California in the latter third of the eighteenth century were literate, their voices and actions are inscribed in official and unofficial sources detailing the colonization of this remote outpost. Women's actions, if not often their words, appear in documents written largely by men, though sometimes penned in women's own hand and at other times written at their behest. These documents expose internal hierarchies, tensions, and contradictions in power relations among women and men as well as among women themselves. The following discussion of mestiza resistance is framed by the acknowledgement that, in the words of historian Florencia Mallon, “No subaltern identity can be pure and transparent; most subalterns are both dominated and dominating subjects, depending on the circumstances or location in which we encounter them.”\textsuperscript{49}

These sources reveal that women frequently contested Hispanic patriarchal norms and acted outside the cultural constructions of femininity that required of women
not merely chastity, if single, and fidelity, if married, but also demanded submissiveness, modesty, and timidity in order to affirm their sexual purity. During the period under study, some women in Alta California—from the high-born Eulalia Callis to the impoverished widow María Feliciana Arballo—consistently resisted and defied patriarchal control of their social and sexual bodies. In some cases, they openly defied the norms that were supposed to control them; in others, they strategically used the idiom of honor to defend themselves, even as their actions violated the honor codes of femininity.

We can only speculate what words and language the twenty-three-year-old, recently widowed Feliciana Arballo spoke to convince Juan Bautista de Anza, over Father Pedro Font’s strenuous objections, to let her, a woman alone with two young daughters and no male guidance or protection, accompany his overland expedition from Sinaloa to Alta California in 1775–1776. Arballo’s husband had died after the family signed up with the expedition to establish settlements on San Francisco Bay, but before they had left Horcasitas. Throughout the journey, Font publicly castigated and rebuked the widow Arballo and remonstrated De Anza for her presence. On the freezing night of December 17, when the weary but jubilant colonists held a dance to celebrate their safe crossing of the treacherous Colorado desert, Font, who was already angry because people were partying instead of praying, became incensed when the young widow joined the party and began singing. “Cheered and applauded by all the crowd,” he wrote, “a very bold widow sang some verses that were not very nice.” For these poblador families, whose subsidy upon becoming colonists allowed them rations for five years, the wages of sailors for two years, and free transportation to the new colony, joining the expedition to Alta California signified a release from the grip of poverty and misery in which the depressed economy of Sinaloa–Sonora submerged them. Arballo, however, did more than defy the priest. She subverted his effort to shame her and control her behavior by inverting the positions, appropriating the public space, and performing within it.

At the other end of the social and economic spectrum, Eulalia Callis, La Gobernadora, also refused to abide the dictum of feminine submissiveness, timidity, and enclosure in the home. Like Arballo, Callis made private matters public and “created a scandal” in February of 1785 by publicly accusing her husband, Governor Pedro Fages, of infidelity and refusing to sleep with him. Fages denied her accusations, saying she fabricated his infidelity as a ploy to force him to relinquish his governorship and return with her and their two children to Mexico. In her petition for legal separation, Callis stated that when she refused the advice of her priest and other men to be recogida or depositada (sheltered or deposited in another’s home) and continued to accuse her husband publicly, she was arrested and, although ill, taken to Mission San Carlos Borromeo, where she was kept incommunicado in a locked and guarded room for several months. During her incarceration, Father de Noriega excoriated her from
the pulpit and repeatedly threatened her with shackles, flogging, and excommunication. Callis, a wealthy woman from an influential family, was manipulating the idiom of gender-honor and notions of women's helplessness to defend her actions.

Historians of early California have dubbed Eulalia Callis the “notorious gobernadora,” writing with tongue-in-cheek about Fages's domestic problems and alter-
A Californio woman grinds corn on a metate in a painting by Alexander Harmer, an American artist who in 1893 married the daughter of an old California family in Santa Barbara. On the ranchos, as in the towns, men typically spent their days on horseback or lounging about, while women, as a traveler observed in the 1840s, performed “most of the drudgery appertaining to housekeeping, and the cultivation of the gardens.” Courtesy Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.

nately portraying Callis as a fiery, tempestuous Catalán woman or as a hysterical woman suffering postpartum depression.54 Today, Callis’s actions seem to have been more a strategy for survival. Callis, who was pregnant four times in six years, was all too familiar with the precariousness of life on the frontier. She gave birth to Pedrito in 1781, had a miscarriage at Arispe in 1782, traveled to California while pregnant with and was ill after the birth of María del Carmen in 1784, and buried an eight-day-old daughter in 1786. Thus her demand that the family return to Mexico City, her public denouncement of Fages, and her suit for ecclesiastical divorce can be reasonably interpreted as part of an overall strategy to ensure her own survival and that of her two remaining children.

Though from different ends of the social spectrum, and with attendant differences of power, Arballo and Callis refused to obey male authority and subverted gender-
honor requirements that they be subservient, meek, and powerless. Both made private matters public and refused their respective priest's mandate of conduct. Both not only subverted the gender-honor code for women, they also undermined the Christianizing and "civilizing" mission by which gente de razón women were to be exemplary models of Spanish-Catholic womanhood's subservience to male authority. In Callis's case, her behavior further subverted the sociopolitical order that Spanish officials were attempting to impose on a racially and culturally mixed population of colonists, whom they already judged to be unruly, undisciplined, and disrespectful of authority.55 Callis's actions, which carried the weight of her family's wealth and influence in Spain as well as her position as La Gobernadora, posed a particularly grave threat to the imposition of Spanish hegemony in the newly conquered territory. If the scarcity of gente de razón women and their importance to survival of frontier colonies liberalized some aspects of gender inequality, patriarchal structures nevertheless remained fundamentally unaltered and the technologies of rule enforced. Thus women's strategies of resistance, how they manipulated their circumstances, had to be carefully and subtly laid.

In view of the political and military imperative to populate Alta California with Christian families, officials of the colonial church and state consistently pressured women to marry, or, in the case of widows, remarry.56 Despite the pressures, some women resisted entering the institution that gave them status in the community. Although the foundling girls of 1800 were brought explicitly as marriage partners for California soldiers, five of the ten girls informed the paymaster at Monterey in 1801 that they "did not want to receive suitors because they did not want to be burdened with marriage."57 Apolinaria Lorenzana, the one niña de cuna who never married, tells us in her testimonio that although she had received a proposal of marriage as a young girl, "I refused his offer . . . because I was not particularly inclined toward that state [of matrimony] even though I knew the merits of that sacred institution."58

Instead, Lorenzana, who became known as La Beata (the pious one), entered a life of work and service in the missions as a llavera, enfermera, cocinera, and maestra (keeper of the keys/matron, nurse, cook, teacher). She maintained her independence, earned her livelihood by working for the Catholic Church, devoted her life to the "civilizing mission" the state assigned to mestiza colonists, and taught herself and others to write. A resourceful and intelligent woman, Lorenzana was respected and well-loved for her good works and selfless devotion to the health and well-being of Indians and mestizos alike. Lorenzana escaped the bonds of matrimony and control of her sexuality. As the llavera at Mission San Diego, however, her duties included policing the sexuality of the young neophyte women living in the mission compound by locking them in the monjero at nightfall and releasing them in the morning. She both resisted and enforced the control of women's sexuality and the sexual norms that Spanish colonial hegemony imposed in California.
The famed southern California ranchero Juan Bandini and his daughter Margarita, who, like her sisters, was celebrated for her beauty, ca. 1857. In domestic life among the Californios, women and children were expected to honor and respect the family patriarch, who, in turn, took pride in providing for the needs of wife and children, especially the protection of a daughter's honor. Courtesy California Historical Society/Title Insurance and Trust Photo Collection, University of Southern California.

Other women—both single and married mestiza women—contested patriarchal control of their sexuality by engaging in “scandalous” and illicit sexual activity. During the period of conquest and settlement, women’s sexual “transgressions” appear, in the records at least, to have been confined to adultery and deshonra (premarital sex). As California during the Mexican era evolved from a subsidized, military society to a more complex agropastoral, ranching, and market economy with more pronounced racial and social stratifications, cases of concubinage and prostitution were added to the list of mestiza women’s illicit sexuality. Sexual violence, in the form of rape and incest, and sexually related violence—beating women to correct their sexual behavior—were present throughout.

Female and male sexuality in the Spanish colonial world was strictly regulated by the civil code, to say nothing of the moral code. Fornication, adultery, concubinage, prostitution, rape, incest, sodomy, bigamy, bestiality, and scandalous behavior were civil crimes for which perpetrators were prosecuted, and women were prosecuted more vigorously than men. Moreover, since civil and canon law vested authority over a woman’s sexuality in the male members of her family, the sexuality of a mother with a grown son, such as forty-year-old Josefa Bernal, was subject to her son’s authority as well as to that of all other male relatives, whether living in the household or not. Bernal barely escaped being beaten by her twenty-five-year-old son Francisco when he found her in an adulterous relationship with Marcelo Pinto.

It is clear that women’s sexuality was also at risk within and without the family. An instance each of rape and incest appears in the colonial records, though a few more
cases of rape, and a case of a teacher accused of molesting female students, were recorded during the Mexican period. In this era, too, cases of concubinage, prostitution, and a significant increase in family violence, most specifically directed at women, appear in the records. Whether the low incidence of sexual violence toward mestiza women in colonial California was due to its nonexistence, to underreporting, or to the fact that most of the sexual violence was directed at Amerindian women has not yet been researched. What is clear is that across the eighty years of Spanish-Mexican rule, sexual violence and sexually related violence toward women became generalized throughout society. Some women responded with equal violence. Most, however, filed formal criminal charges against violent spouses in court. Women had frequent recourse to the judicial system, and the records of Mexican tribunals contain cases that women filed in civil as well as criminal court, where they appear as both plaintiffs and defendants.

One approach to analysis of women's resistance during the Mexican period centers on the nineteenth-century narratives. Thus, Genaro Padilla finds that while Californio men's narratives remained embedded in patriarchal constructs, Californio women's narratives “voiced resistance to patriarchal domination that characterized social relations . . . and assertively figured themselves as agents in the social world they inhabited.” Women's narratives offered gendered perspectives that were critical of patriarchal constraints, affirmed women's presence in the public realm, and refuted the common assumption that Californio women welcomed the Euro-American conquest.

CONCLUSIONS

The construction of Amerindian and mestiza women's subjectivities in Alta California, as this essay has demonstrated, has historically been contested terrain. Most specifically, women's sexual and social bodies, their sexuality, their procreation, and the control of it have been the province of the patriarchal family, church, and state. Some women resisted, defied, and subverted patriarchal control of their sexuality within the family and without. From differing positions of power, as well as from contradictory locations, they carved out spaces, took actions, and fashioned responses within the family, which was at once a primary place of resistance, power, authority, and conflict.

The family was, and is, the most basic unit of sociopolitical organization and relations of power internally as well as externally. It was the primary place where women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Alta California constructed identity and subjectivity within the historical process of successive waves of conquest and colonialism, wherein mestizas were alternately part of the colonizing forces and part of the colonized peoples. In the Spanish colonial world, and particularly in new territories under conquest, the “Western” family, in its Spanish-Catholic incarnation,
was deployed as a pivotal technology of rule. We are only now beginning to grapple with the complexities and contradictions of what that meant in the construction of "native" women's identities and subjectivities on the California homeland that was then, as it is now, contested space.

Engendering the history of Alta California, moving gender and the body to the center of historical inquiry, challenges us to rethink our conceptual, empirical, analytic, and interpretive categories. It challenges us to question and reevaluate extant sources and our own assumptions as we approach them, and further summons us to expand the sources we use to study nonwritten text and other constructs of history. This chapter forms a small part of the larger feminist effort to engender and rethink history.

NOTES


8. Klein and Ackerman, eds., Women and Power in Native North America, see especially Klein and Ackerman's introduction and essays by Victoria D. Patterson, Mary Shepardson, Sue-Ellen Jacobs, and Daniel Maltz and JoAllyn Archambault; Shoemaker, ed., Negotiators of Change, especially Shoemaker's introduction and essays by Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Carol Douglas Sparks; Gosner and Kanter, eds., Ethnology, special issue, especially the essays by Alvis E. Dunn, Martha Few, and Irene Silverblatt.


17. Heizing, “A Californian Messianic Movement of 1801 among the Chumash.”


27. Serra to Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, Monterey, 24 August 1774, Writings, 2: 143; Serra to Bucareli, Monterey, 8 January 1775, Writings, 2: 203; Serra to Bucareli, Monterey, 30 June 1778, Writings, 3: 199.

28. Serra to Bucareli, Mexico City, 13 March 1773, Writings, 1: 325; Serra to Bucareli, Mexico City, 22 April 1773, Writings, 1: 341; Serra to Bucareli, Monterey, 24 August 1775, Writings, 2: 149, 151, and 153.


34. José María Estudillo, comandante de la compañía presidial, Información sobre nobleza de sangle del Sargento Ignacio Vallejo y decreto concedido lo pedido, 20 julio 1807, Monterey, California, Archives of California, 16: 356; Ynformación sobre la legitimidad y limpieza de sangre de Don Ignacio Vicente Ferrer Vallejo, padre del General Don Mariano Vallejo, 1806–1847, M. G. Vallejo Collection, Documentos para la Historia, Bancroft Library.

35. The origin and meaning of the term “Californio” remains unstudied. The earliest reference I have found to the use of this term is in the records of accounts of animals, crops, and the distribution of corn and wheat for the years 1782, 1784, and 1787 at Mission San Ca-


41. Miranda, “Gente de Razón Marriage Patterns.”


44. Lockhart, “A Demographic Profile of an Alta California Pueblo,” 60–69.


47. Miranda, “Gente de Razón Marriage Patterns”; Miranda, “Hispano-Mexicano Childrearing Practices”; Lockhart, “A Demographic Profile of an Alta California Pueblo.” Two chapters of my manuscript in progress are based on demographic data that trace women in the marriage and birth (baptismal) records across the four presidios.


51. Ibid., 4: 428.

52. Ibid., 4: 228.

53. Ystancia de Doña Eulalia Callis, Muger de Don Pedro Fages, gobernador de California, sobre que se le oyga en justicia, y redima de la opresión que padece, 23 August 1785, Archivo General de la Nación, Provincias Internas, 120: 66–81, Collection, Bancroft Library.


61. José Argüello a Fages, 26 noviembre de 1788, San Francisco, Trato ilícito entre un soldado y una muger casada, Archives of California, 4: 250.
62. Carrillo, 28 de noviembre de 1806, Santa Barbara, Causa de incesto, Archives of California, 16: 342–56; Antonio María Pico, Juez constitucional de primera nominación, 7 de mayo de 1845, San José Guadalupe. Causa criminal contra el vecino Mariano Duarte, maestro de escuela por tentativas de estupro en niñas de menor edad, Archives of California, 69: 139–42.
63. For Monterey, see Criminal Court Records, Mexican Archives of Monterey County, Office of the County Clerk, Salinas, Calif.
64. Padilla, My History, Not Yours, 26; Sánchez, Telling Identities; Richard Griswold del Castillo, “Neither Activist Nor Victim: Mexican Women’s Historical Discourse—The Case of San Diego, 1820–1850,” California History (Fall 1995): 230–43.