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Gender, Race, and the West  
12 December 2014

### Passions, Property, and Power: Mexican-Anglo Marriage in the Spanish Borderlands

Interracial unions, as well as the legal and social prohibitions against such unions, reflect the ways in which societies consolidate power and regulate domestic arrangements. In the southwest, the study of intermarriage illuminates the intersection of race, gender, and culture on this colonial frontier. In focusing on Mexican-Anglo intermarriages in Texas, New Mexico, and California, this paper will demonstrate how historians reconceptualized the study of intermarriage based on their fields of study and how these studies were influenced by the dominant historical paradigms of the time. During the second half of the twentieth century, historians struggled to reconcile the studies of larger historical forces of assimilation, conquest, and colonialism with studies of individual agency and patterns of accommodation and resistance against oppressive circumstances. Sociologists, Marxists, cultural and social historians, feminists, Chicanas, borderlands historians, colonial and post-colonial historians have all analyzed Mexican-Anglo marriages. Their conclusions vary in explaining the motivations and consequences of interracial unions, as well as the amount of agency Mexican women may have expressed in choosing their marital partners.

In theoretical terms, historians have dramatically reconceptualized the study of intermarriage over the second half of the twentieth century. Until recently, the majority of studies on intermarriage have been carried out by social scientists, who have focused their analysis on the laws of social behavior that account for the incidence of interracial marriage.<sup>1</sup> In the immediate post-war period, American structural-functional theorists laid out an explicit theory of

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<sup>1</sup> Peggy Pascoe, "Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 12, no. 1 (1991): 5.

social structures, which produced much of the “classic” theories of sociology.<sup>2</sup> Structural functionalism reached the peak of its influence in the 1940s and 1950s, during which time Claude Lévi-Strauss analyzed the role of marriage as a form of exchange between less powerful and more powerful allies. According to Lévi-Strauss, “dual organizations” existed in precapitalist societies, and were marked by a system in which, “members of the community, whether it be a tribe or a village, are divided into two parts which maintain complex relationships varying from open hostility to very close intimacy, and with which various forms of rivalry and co-operation are usually associated.”<sup>3</sup>

Dual organizations existed within tribes and could apply to different tribes and communities of peoples. Within the American Southwest, structural-functionalist theorists posited that women were the means by which men literally and symbolically maintained peaceful relations with outsider groups. In this context, Amerindians represented the less powerful political group in the face of sixteenth century Spanish conquest. María Raquel Casas, one of the leading contemporary Chicana historians, claims that structuralist theories of the 1950s overemphasized the utilitarian role of women in intermarriage. Despite this critique, the majority of historians still tend to agree that intermarriage was important for alliance building between Mexican elites and Euro-American immigrants in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Another explanation for the prevalence of Mexican-Anglo marriages with a functionalist element claims that Anglo-American men only sought out marriages with Mexican women because there were too few Anglo-American women in frontier societies. Again, this argument

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<sup>2</sup> Charles, Crothers. “Recent Works on Social Structure: A Literature-Review Essay” *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 22, no. 97 (1996): 97.

<sup>3</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, John Richard Von Sturmer, James Harle Bell, and Rodney Needham, *The elementary structures of kinship*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 69

<sup>4</sup> María Raquel Casas, *Married to a daughter of the land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820-1880*. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2007), 22.

has the effect of commodifying Mexican women because these women theoretically represented the only options for immigrating men. It also does not explain why Anglo-American men sought out marriages primarily with Mexican women, and not Indian women. Regardless, historian Albert Hurtado argues that there were far more men than women in colonial California, which drove male competition for eligible women and fostered early betrothal of young girls. He even cites the example of Sergeant Ygnacio Vicente Ferrer Vallejo who found it so important to marry a woman with similar Spanish bloodlines, that he became engaged to an infant girl on the day of her birth. In 1776, Vallejo helped deliver his future wife, whom he would formally marry when he was forty and she was fourteen.<sup>5</sup> Hurtado argues that arranged marriages buttressed patriarchal authority and reinforced the power of an oligarchy of elite landowners, but his analysis leaves very little room for Mexican women's agency in these unions. According to Hurtado, "The young women who formed interfamily links seldom had much to say about it; when they did speak up there was little chance that they would be taken seriously."<sup>6</sup> Clearly an infant would not have the capacity to refuse this marriage proposal, but Hurtado does not recognize Mexican women's actions in pushing against race and gender boundaries within such unions.

Although later historians criticized structural functionalist approaches to studying intermarriage because of its utilitarian analysis of Mexican women, it has nevertheless remained a popular discourse due in part to Marxist economic determinist interpretations. By claiming that "male chauvinism" and women's oppression can only be understood by analyzing class, historians have essentially reduced the roles of Mexican women to mere objects, which were traded between powerful male groups. This "commodification" argument highlights how

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<sup>5</sup> Albert L. Hurtado, *Intimate frontiers: sex, gender, and culture in old California*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Hurtado, 129.

Mexican patriarchs and Anglo-American men exploited Mexican women, but it also eliminates any trace of women's agency in these coercive encounters, which later feminist and Chicana historians sought to reclaim as part of the dominant narrative.

Post-structuralism and cultural studies of the 1960s and 1970s arose in response to structural functionalism's immutable categories of societies and peoples, which eventually gave way to a larger cultural and gendered perspective of history. Rejecting the older paradigm, in which culture was seen as "a relatively unified system of values and beliefs," social historians emphasized the "community strength, collective consciousness, and active agency of people in the various cultures" they studied.<sup>7</sup> Rather than focusing solely on the histories of elite white men, social historians analyzed broader categories of race, class, and gender. Within this new paradigm, historians no longer analyzed Mexican women as mere commodities in an exchange system between elite Mexican families and Euro-American men. Rather, historians adopted what Casas calls a "feminine perspective" by focusing on the lives of Mexican women, who were traditionally considered of secondary importance because of both their race and gender.<sup>8</sup> Casas stops short of calling this a "feminist perspective" because historians' conclusions about Mexican women were often problematic. Although these historians attempted to fully understand the positions and contributions of Mexican women, they were influenced by contemporary paradigms of assimilation, which ultimately concluded that women were primarily victims.<sup>9</sup>

In 1976, Jane Dysart adopted such a "feminine perspective" in examining intermarriages between Mexican women and Anglo-American men in San Antonio from 1830 to 1860. Within this period, Dysart describes how intermarriage united Anglo political influence with Mexican landed wealth in Texas. Historians have also found this interracial alliance-making between

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<sup>7</sup> Pascoe, "Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage," 12.

<sup>8</sup> Casas, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Casas, 11.

Mexican patriarchs and Anglo immigrants present in the regions of New Mexico and California around the time of the Mexican-American War. According to civil marriage records dating from 1837 to 1860, 906 Mexican women married Mexican men, and only 88 chose to marry Anglos. While only accounting for roughly 10 percent of marriages, nearly half of Anglo-Mexican marriages involved women from high status families. What is more, at least one daughter from almost every *rico* family in San Antonio married an Anglo.<sup>10</sup> Dysart argues that there was a clear class component to these interracial arrangements, in that wealthy Mexican patriarchs sought to establish family connections with the dominant Anglo group after Texas gained its independence from Mexico in 1836. Because Mexican daughters customarily inherited property on a relatively equal basis with sons, Anglo men who married Mexican women gained extensive landholdings while tapping into existing networks of power.

While Dysart examines the motivations behind Mexican-Anglo intermarriage based on the interests of men in both parties, she also makes a point to mention the effects of these marriages on Mexican women. In setting the foundation of her study, she claims that historians must “treat the women as active participants, rather than passive objects in the historical process.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly, she adopts a burgeoning feminist stance; however, her conclusions about Mexican women are often problematic when compared to those of contemporary feminist and Chicana scholars like Casas. Dysart claims that Mexican-Anglo marriages initiated a process of assimilation and acculturation that subsumed women’s identities under the project of Americanization. According to Dysart, “cultural, ethnic, and even racial distinctions were blurred as the two groups incorporated in a common culture. Where prevailing attitudes assuming cultural or racial superiority prevented extensive intermarriage, the assimilation

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<sup>10</sup> Jane Dysart, “Mexican Women in San Antonio, 1830-1860: The Assimilation Process” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 7, no. 4 (1976): 370.

<sup>11</sup> Dysart, 366.

process was only partially complete.”<sup>12</sup> Although Dysart proclaims the need to recognize Mexican women’s participation in the historical process, she also paints these women as victims of the larger forces of Anglo assimilation. At worst, assimilation effectively stripped these women of their cultural identities, and at best, their identities melted down into an amalgamated “common” culture.

Although Dysart fails to recognize the complexities of women’s agency within intermarriages, she does recognize some ways in which women held fast to their religion and kinship networks. Dysart used baptismal records to show that children retained their Catholic faith and census records to demonstrate the strength of Mexican kinship networks due to the presence of Mexican grandparents in these interracial households. Mexican mothers often gave their children typically “Spanish” names and relied on godparents to guide their children in the faith. However, Dysart backtracks by claiming that children “established their identity with their father’s ethnic group,” and that school attendance, as well as the next generations’ marriage to non-Mexicans, hastened the process of assimilation.<sup>13</sup>

Like Dysart, Darlis A. Miller adopts an assimilationist stance while writing about New Mexico in 1982, but she also adopts a “feminine stance” examining the lives and qualities of Mexican women. According to Miller, earlier historians of Mexican-American marriages attributed these relationships solely to Anglo-Americans’ land hunger, whereas she claims, these women “were valued by Anglo men for many reasons: as helpmates, links to powerful Hispanic families, and as mothers, companions, and lovers.”<sup>14</sup> She also claims that “Hispanic women were

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<sup>12</sup> Dysart, 365.

<sup>13</sup> Dysart, 374.

<sup>14</sup> Darlis A. Miller, “Cross-Cultural Marriages in the Southwest: The New Mexico Experience, 1846-1900” *New Mexico Historical Review* 57, no. 4 (1982): 336.

universally praised for their kindness and hospitality.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps, Miller attempted to counter racist stereotypes of Mexican women, but her claims of Anglos’ glorification of these women’s positive qualities may also blur the realities of racism at the time. More recently, colonial historian Linda Gordon argued that Anglo-American men adopted an “Orientalist” construction of Mexican women, which “made them seem simultaneously submissive and exotically sexually attractive.”<sup>16</sup> Thus historians today claim that Anglo-American men held both negative and positive stereotypes of Mexican women, which effectively “othered” these women.

Miller’s discussion of nineteenth century intermarriages in New Mexico is similar to Dysart’s findings in San Antonio. According to Miller, Anglo merchants and adventurers immigrated to the region after Mexican independence from Spain in 1821. She claims that by the 1850s, there was a predominantly male Anglo population of between 500 and 1200 people. Like Hurtado’s claims about intermarriages in California, Miller argues that these men arrived without wives so they were essentially “forced” into marrying into the local population. She also notes a particular class component to Mexican-Anglo marriages, which Dysart also found in Texas. According to Miller, many early Anglo settlers married into the territory’s elite Hispanic families, which essentially “tied an intruding foreign population to the ruling class of New Mexico and smoothed the transition to American rule.”<sup>17</sup> However, she also relies on the work of historian Nancie Gonzáles to claim that in the early years after American conquest, “intermarriage between Anglo men and Mexican women was apparently quite common and not restricted to any particular social class.”<sup>18</sup> Gonzáles examined the 1880 census and found that in the territorial capital of Sante Fe, 63 percent of married Anglo men were joined in mixed

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<sup>15</sup> Miller, 340.

<sup>16</sup> Linda Gordon, “Internal Colonialism and Gender” in *Haunted by empire: geographies of intimacy in North American history* ed. Ann Laura Stoler, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 439.

<sup>17</sup> Miller, 337.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, 341.

marriages in 1870.<sup>19</sup> Rather than claiming that intermarriage was largely restricted to elite Mexicans and Anglos, Miller argues that intermarriage was a common phenomenon between all classes, which calls into question the motivations for these marriages.

According to Miller, military records and census returns indicate that in the post-1830 period intermarriages abounded in the laboring and artisan classes. These Anglo-American men included “farm laborers, carpenters, blacksmiths, miners, butchers, cooks, and numerous small farmers. The women who married these men frequently came from humble surroundings.”<sup>20</sup> While historians argue that elite marriages served common economic and political interests of Mexican and Anglo-American men, Miller’s argument about the prevalence of lower-class intermarriages begs for an explanation. Miller is careful not to claim that these women *chose* their marriage partners, but she does insinuate that these interracial unions came about for solely economic reasons. Despite finding that these intermarriages were not limited to the elite class who presumably had more at stake in protecting their wealth and class status, she does not draw any further conclusions about whether women from lower-class backgrounds had more freedom in choosing their marital partners.

Casas’ primary study examined nineteenth century marriages between Californianas and Euro-American men, though she also discusses Deena González’s study of intermarriages in Sante Fe, New Mexico to demonstrate how historians have historically overstated the prevalence of such unions. Deena González finds that in the 1850s, approximately 100 out of 239 Euro-American men, mostly trappers and traders who had decided to settle in New Mexican communities, were married to New Mexican women. While this number is shockingly high (just like Nancie Gonzáles’ findings for 1870) in comparison to the total New Mexican community,

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<sup>19</sup> Miller, 341.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, 342.

these marriages meant that only 2 percent of New Mexican women were married to Euro-American men.<sup>21</sup> According to Casas, historians' manipulation of how common intermarriage was around the mid-nineteenth century is important because—in focusing only on Anglo men—it “epitomizes the way in which historians have projected their ethnocentric cultural attitudes toward intermarriage.”<sup>22</sup> In claiming that these marriages were quite common, historians are perpetuating racist claims of the nineteenth century that maintained Mexican women preferred relationships with Anglo-American men over Mexican men. Historians' overestimation of intermarriage also seems to validate America's project of colonization in the Southwest because these women appear to be naturally drawn to the conquerors.

Casas illustrates how even present day historians' understandings of Mexican women's motivations continue to be tainted by the racialized ideologies of the nineteenth century. Both Casas and Hurtado rely on information obtained from nineteenth century historian Hubert Howe Bancroft, who compiled brief biographies of prominent California pioneers, including marriage data. Casas relies heavily on Bancroft's compilation of elite Mexican women's narratives to support her arguments about women's agency. Bancroft recorded 80 mixed marriages between 1817 and 1848.<sup>23</sup> While providing objective data of intermarriages, he also expressed the socioracial ideologies of the day by asserting that Californianas readily preferred Euro-Americans as marriage partners because of the “physical, moral, spiritual, and cultural deficiencies that the women were alleged to perceive among their own Californio menfolk.”<sup>24</sup> Surprisingly, these racist discourses continue to permeate contemporary historical scholarship on intermarriage today.

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<sup>21</sup> Casas, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Casas, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Hurtado, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Casas, 10.

Colonial historian Linda Gordon draws on these racist nineteenth century ideas about Anglo and Mexican men's racial differences with the aim of celebrating Mexican women's agency in choosing marital partners. According to Gordon, "Mexican women were not merely exchanged. They often preferred or even sought out marriages with white men because of their reputation of being more egalitarian, less controlling than Mexican men and because of their better jobs and greater resources."<sup>25</sup> Although a feminist claim in highlighting women's choice, her arguments are problematic for several reasons. Miller pointed out that "diaries, letters, and journals written by Hispanic women are rare, making it difficult to assess the impact that interethnic marriages had on Hispanic women."<sup>26</sup> The lack of documents from Mexican women themselves makes not only the consequences of intermarriages difficult to ascertain, but also the motivations for such unions. Gordon may be exaggerating how much say these women actually had in choosing their partners, while also perpetuating Anglo-American men's racist claims made about Mexican men.

While Casas opposes historians' problematic understanding of Mexican women's motivations in intermarriage, she also argues against historians' descriptions of the consequences of these unions. According to Miller, "For many New Mexican women, a rise in social status accompanied marriage to an Anglo. The latter generally—but not always—had more money to spend than his Hispanic counterpart and usually was better educated."<sup>27</sup> Casas flatly denies this assertion, in stating "these marriages did not instigate upward social mobility for the women as previously assumed."<sup>28</sup> Miller also describes Mexican women as victimized objects and Anglo men as active subjects. According to Miller, "Rather than being assimilated into Hispanic

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon, 439.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, 346.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, 342.

<sup>28</sup> Casas, 13.

society, Anglo husbands became agents for social change.”<sup>29</sup> Chicana historians refute the validity of assimilationist discourse for the very reason that it represents a male-dominated discourse that leaves women powerless in the face of cultural oppression.

Although Miller tends to portray Mexican women as victims of oppression, she does redeem herself in discussing how some women retained their Catholic faith and “Spanish” customs. However, she goes on to claim, “Spanish was not universally spoken in the home,” and that “schools, visits from Anglo relatives, and the presence of English-speaking neighbors hastened assimilation.”<sup>30</sup> She relies on census records of the city of Las Cruces to argue that the majority of school-aged children of mixed marriages attended school, and therefore, underwent a process of assimilation. In San Antonio, Dysart argued that the children of mixed marriages sought marriages with Anglo-Americans, while Miller explains that children of mixed marriages in New Mexico often married individuals who were themselves the products of cross-cultural unions.<sup>31</sup> Dysart claims census and marriage records show that second generation were assimilated because as adults, they Anglicized their names and married Anglo-American partners.

In resisting these claims of assimilation, Casas argues that in California, Euro-American men married into well-connected Californio families and had to accommodate themselves into a woman’s family and culture. According to Casas, “the Euro-American husband and resulting children became Hispanicized.”<sup>32</sup> It is far more likely that Euro-American men accommodated Mexican families before the Mexican-American War when elite Mexican men were in power and controlled the majority of land, and is perhaps, less true after Mexico’s defeat when the

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<sup>29</sup> Miller, 347.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, 352.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, 353.

<sup>32</sup> Casas, 13.

Southwest became part of the United States. While Casas' argument may be an overgeneralization about Mexican-Anglo marriages over time, she firmly asserts Mexican women as cultural agents and negotiators of interracial exchanges. For Chicana historians, Mexican women represent the ultimate actors in their own stories, which require a more nuanced understanding of how they both accommodated and resisted the pressures put on them by Euro-American husbands, changing legal structures, and gender roles.

In the 1980s, assimilation and acculturation discourse still represented the dominant paradigm. However, some historians were moving away from analyzing women as victims of larger forces of oppression. One such groundbreaking work on intermarriage was Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties* published in 1983. Although her work centered on Native American women and intermarriage with Euro-American men within the Canadian fur trade, her focus on "intimate frontiers" inspired later scholars of the Spanish borderlands, feminism, (inter)colonialism, and post-colonialism. Kirk argued that marriages between fur traders and Indian women created bonds of mutual dependency that advanced cultural exchange along with trade relations. Like Casas who described Mexican women as cultural agents, Kirk described Indian women as cultural brokers, which represented a move away from the contemporary narrative of women of color as mere victims of assimilation.

Published only four years later in 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* struck the heaviest blow to the assimilationist discourse in her analysis of the "mestiza consciousness" in the Spanish borderlands. Rather than claiming Mexican women were forced to give up their ethnic identities in order to adopt Anglo cultural norms, Anzaldúa describes an ethno-cultural consciousness that is rife with conflict, but which also holds the opportunity to cure society's ills. As Mestizas, Mexican women are daughters of Indian mothers and Spanish fathers, and are

forced to undergo an inner struggle or “inner war” of borders. For Anzaldúa, Chicana culture itself represents a form of inner cultural domination where “commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture.”<sup>33</sup> According to Anzaldúa, these identities do not disappear under assimilationist policies, and instead result in a new consciousness that uproots dualistic thinking and asymmetrical power relationships by its very “mixedness.”

Her arguments do not provide a plan for tackling systematic patterns of oppression and exploitation because she views multiracial peoples’ racial ambiguity and tolerance for contradictions as a necessary precursor to racial equality and coexistence. Anzaldúa also responds to assimilationist arguments that the majority of children of Mexican-Anglo marriages adopted their Anglo father’s identity. According to Anzaldúa, racial mixedness cannot simply be “unlearned” through Anglo cultural practices, but is written on people’s DNA. She argues:

At the confluence of two or more genetic streams with chromosomes constantly ‘crossing over,’ this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una consciencia de mujer*.<sup>34</sup>

Anzaldúa refutes any claims for the existence of a “dominant” Anglo race or “weaker” Mexican and Indian races, which assimilationist arguments rested on. She also adopts scientific language to discredit pseudoscientific racist claims made about the “mongrelization” of races. Anzaldúa’s work refocused writing about race and gender, however, her claims that racial mixing was evident on even the biological level, reinforces the illusion that race exists as a scientific reality.

Writing in 1991, Peggy Pascoe argued for the study of intermarriage within a feminist analytical framework for the very reason that race and gender were often treated as physical

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<sup>33</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*. (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 100.

<sup>34</sup> Anzaldúa, 99.

realities, rather than as social constructions. According to Pascoe, historians “tend to accept the social-scientific assumption that race and sex themselves are immutable categories, the “givens” of historical analysis; they stop short of investigating historical changes in notions of race and gender.”<sup>35</sup> She argues that historians have even greater difficulty analyzing race as a social construction than gender because feminist scholars have distinguished between the notion of sex as a biological category and gender as a social construction. Pascoe also nods to more recent feminist scholarship, which adds another layer of complexity to the argument by claiming that like gender, sex itself is a social construction.<sup>36</sup>

Along with the focus on race and gender as social constructions, the 1990’s also saw a rise in critical cultural studies and a refocusing of social history. Historians who adopted a cultural critical model, analyzed power and conflict within given cultures. According to Pascoe, this approach had “its roots in critical theory, poststructuralist literary criticism, and postmodern anthropology,” and examined culture as a site of conflict where various groups struggled to control symbols and meaning.<sup>37</sup> With regards to the history of interracial marriage, this approach highlighted power relations within given cultures, but Pascoe argues that ultimately, the cultural critical model emphasized larger forces at the expense of individual agency. According to Pascoe, this model was counterproductive to feminist historians because it “deemphasizes personal agency and choice, which does not empower “subaltern” groups to share their own experiences.”<sup>38</sup> While social historians aimed to emphasize ordinary people as active agents in their own lives, Pascoe claimed that they also tend to keep relationships between cultures on the margins of their studies. Pascoe states, “To keep a firm eye on the tension between the power of

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<sup>35</sup> Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” 5.

<sup>36</sup> Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” 9.

<sup>37</sup> Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” 13.

<sup>38</sup> Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” 15.

the dominant, on the one hand, and the agency of the oppressed, on the other, we must choose sites in which multiple cultures are present, and we must focus on the problem of recovering the perspectives of the powerless, as well as the powerful.”<sup>39</sup> The study of intermarriage requires feminist theory, which analyzes dominant groups and oppressive forces, while also understanding how people influenced race and gender relations through their resistance and accommodation.

As a contemporary Chicana historian, Casas adopts a feminist analytical stance and draws on notions of Mexican women’s hybridity to analyze Mexican-Anglo intermarriage in the California borderlands region. Casas was also inspired by Kirk’s *Many Tender Ties* and argued that the similarities between Native American and Mexican women involved in marriages with Euro-American men were significant, particularly “the economic and collaborative roles that women played in incorporating their husbands into specific cultural exchanges. Both Canadian Native American women and Californianas became “women in between.”<sup>40</sup> Historians like Casas and Anzaldúa have focused precisely on Mexican women’s “in-betweenness” in order to assert a space where these women expressed their agency.

Casas describes her work as a larger project of Chicana history, which reclaims the histories of Mexican women who chose to marry “outsiders.” According to Casas, Chicana historians of the 1970s largely ignored the study of Mexican-Anglo marriages because these relationships represented “the act of powerful males taking women from powerless men. For Mexicans and Chicanos, pride in their miscegenated background was counterbalanced by shame that it resulted from a devastating military and cultural conquest.”<sup>41</sup> While the studies of intermarriage may have stirred up feelings of shame related to an American colonial conquest, it

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<sup>39</sup> Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” 15.

<sup>40</sup> Casas, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Casas, 12.

can also be argued that Chicana historians may have viewed these women as interlopers or race traitors who compromised their ethnic identities and communities by “sleeping with the enemy.” Casas seeks to overcome this historical marginalization of women who intermarried with foreigners in order to express Mexican women’s participation in cultural exchange and resistance.

Casas roots her analysis of nineteenth century Mexican-Anglo marriages in the California region within the context of a larger colonial project. During the initial wave of conquest during the sixteenth century, the Spanish crown promoted marriage with Amerindians, or “daughters of the land,” in order to gain access to property and stabilize the border.<sup>42</sup> By the nineteenth century, Mexican Californios had acquired the vast majority of land and began using the term “daughters of the land” to refer to their own California-born daughters. Consequently, Amerindian women were lowered in social status to being merely Indian.<sup>43</sup> Although the concept of race was more fluid in colonial societies than in Spain, the rules controlling domestic arrangements reflected the empire’s larger imperial goals of expansion. Invading Americans had these same goals of expansion and also appropriated colonial language to legitimize their conquest in the nineteenth century. They, too, reinforced their claims of a natural association to the land by marrying the Mexican “daughters of the land.” On the other hand, marriages to Indian women were no longer useful because they did not own the land.

Although American colonizers adopted the same language to justify land-taking, the consequences of intermarriage on Mexican populations varied based on the region. According to Casas, in New Mexico “the marriage of Europeans to ‘daughters of the land’ brought value and

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<sup>42</sup> Casas, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Casas, 8.

wealth to the women and their families, whereas in California the opposite occurred.”<sup>44</sup> By the early-nineteenth century, a landed-elite already existed in California, which essentially absorbed Euro-Americans into its folds. Euro-American men were the major benefactors of property and wealth. In return, elite Mexican families affirmed their social standing and status by maintaining the racial purity of their Spanish background.

In looking at the numbers of intermarriages, Casas cites several scholars who place the percentage of interethnic marriages between Californianas and Euro-Americans in 1840 at roughly 15 percent of the total Californio population.<sup>45</sup> This relatively low number of interethnic unions again demonstrates how previous historical scholarship has exaggerated how common these relationships actually were in the Spanish borderlands. Casas blames historians’ overstatements on their own Eurocentric beliefs about Mexican women being overwhelmingly drawn to white men for sexual or economic reasons.<sup>46</sup> The census data also shows that only half of the Euro-American trappers who entered California married Mexican women. Historians like Hurtado have analyzed these relationships from an Anglo-male perspective by claiming that immigrating men were essentially forced to marry Mexican women due to the lack of Anglo-American women. Casas’ analysis, on the other hand, assigns Mexican families with the agency to deny lower-class Euro-American trappers entry into their prestigious family networks.

Mexican patriarchs sought out proper marital partners for their daughters in order to maintain their status and protect their political and economic interests around the time of the Mexican-American War in 1846. While elite Mexican men sought stability in forming alliances with the Euro-American invaders, Casas argues that the marriages between Californianas and the second wave of Euro-Americans were far less stable in the 1840s. She claims that Euro-

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<sup>44</sup> Casas, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Casas, 135.

<sup>46</sup> Casas, 13.

Americans who settled in California after 1836—the year that Texas gained its independence from Mexico—were less likely to abide by customary social mores. By the 1840s, the most desirable lands were already taken and Euro-Americans viewed Mexican cultural protocol as an obstacle to their ability to establish their own homesteads and ranchos.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, 10.2 percent of all trappers and traders eventually separated from their Mexican wives.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps, Euro-American men no longer saw the value in interethnic unions with a conquered people following Mexico's defeat in the Mexican-American War.

After the Mexican-American War, Casas focuses her analysis on how Mexican women adapted to the cultural expectations of their Euro-American spouses and biethnic families, as well as the changing legal systems and gender roles of American society. Unlike earlier historians who focused on women's assimilation, Casas examined how women expressed their agency. After the conquest, Mexican women lost many of the traditional ways in which they contested their prescribed sexual boundaries, including the community legal system. Under Mexican law, a married woman retained control of any property she had acquired prior to marriage, and could air her grievances in court. By exposing displeasure with a spouse, Mexican women enlisted public censure to obtain counseling or modify their spouse's behavior. According to Casas, the courts had a high success rate of reconciliation, with 85 percent of spouses returning to their marriages, and only 15 percent separating.<sup>49</sup> Although only a minority of marriages dissolved, communities were forced to accept these women living alone. Indeed, Casas cites social historian Richard Griswold del Castillo who estimates that single women ran 13 percent of all Californio households in the post-Mexican War era.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Casas, 127.

<sup>48</sup> Casas, 135.

<sup>49</sup> Casas, 134.

<sup>50</sup> Casas, 118.

The California Congressional Convention of 1850 recognized Mexican women's rights to community property, however, women lost the underlying legal structures and social relationships that protected their interests under the Mexican government. Despite this loss, women found new avenues to resist their gendered boundaries by utilizing the American legal system. According to Casas, Mexican women's will-making became "the primary means of preserving inheritances and of keeping property out of the prying hands of Euro-Americans."<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Casas explains that after the war, more women gave their power of attorney to men, but that these women also placed strict limits on the power of these "attorneys."<sup>52</sup> She goes on to argue, "Rather than interpreting such transactions as reinforcements of stereotypical gender roles, we need to see how these transactions, like wills, pushed against patriarchal boundaries and helped to fulfill women's desires and needs."<sup>53</sup> This new perspective is representative of a historical change in how historians described the genuine obstacles Mexican women faced in their marriages and under their new government without painting them as victims.

Casas respects Mexican women's agency in highlighting the subtle ways in which they pursued their own interests by accommodating and resisting the new systems of power. Casas cites the example of María Amparo Ruíz, who used her maternal surname "Ruíz" throughout her adult life because it was a more prestigious and influential family name in Baja California than "Maitorena."<sup>54</sup> When Ruíz married Lieutenant Colonel Henry Stanton Burton, she abandoned her maiden name due to the same class motivations. Casas argues, "In terms of class, the name of Burton advanced and protected her interactions with American society; therefore, she made a relatively quick and easy accommodation. Yet she raised her children in a bilingual, bicultural

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<sup>51</sup> Casas, 123.

<sup>52</sup> Casas, 125.

<sup>53</sup> Casas, 126.

<sup>54</sup> Casas, 159.

household.”<sup>55</sup> Far from being a victim of assimilation, Casas portrays María Amparo Ruíz-Burton as a savvy woman who chose to take her husband’s name in order to protect her economic interests. In some ways, Casas argues that Mexican women retained what really mattered to them on an intimate level by raising their children in a way that honored their Mexican background.

Writing in 2012, historian Ann Hyde also analyzed subtle resistance within a feminist analytical stance, but from the perspective of the second generation. María de Jesus was the daughter of Ramona Yorba, an elite Mexican woman; and Benjamin Davis Wilson; a former fur trader who arrived in southern California in 1841. Wilson married into an old Californio family, and according to Hyde, “took on the trappings of elite Mexican life,” included landownership.<sup>56</sup> Yorba and Wilson had several children before she died, including María de Jesus. Like Casas, Hyde discusses women’s agency with regards to accommodation, rather than their victimization. Like María Amparo Burton, María de Jesus also voluntarily changed her name in order to protect her class status. According to Hyde, María de Jesus became Sue Wilson when she went to boarding school in San Francisco. Although she accommodated American society with her name change, she refused to give up her religion. She was pressured to become a Protestant by her new stepmother, Margaret Hereford Wilson, but Hyde argues that she remained a practicing Catholic with the support of her Mexican relatives.<sup>57</sup>

Sue later married James DeBarth Shorb, a gold rush emigrant to California, and had eleven children. According to Hyde, Sue Wilson “seemed not to be burdened by racial markers”

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<sup>55</sup> Casas, 161.

<sup>56</sup> Anne F. Hyde, “Hard Choices: Mixed Race Families and Strategies of Acculturation in the U.S. West after 1848” in *On the Borders of Love and Power Families and Kinship in the Intercultural American Southwest* ed. David Wallace Adams and Crista DeLuzio, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 107.

<sup>57</sup> Hyde, 108.

even though she looked “Mexican.”<sup>58</sup> Hyde concludes that her father’s status and her husband’s financial success allowed Sue and her children to “move easily into the upper-class world of wealthy southern Californians but also to retain their ties to the Californio Yorba family through naming and godparenting.”<sup>59</sup> As a woman “in-between,” Sue Wilson did not appear alienated, but rather seems to have taken advantage of the familial ties of both her mother and father. She protected her class interests by asserting her connections with her father’s and husband’s “whiteness,” while also tapping into kinship and religious support networks. While Hyde explains that Sue “managed to cross growing ethnic divides,” she also concedes, that “marriage between Anglos and Mexican Californians grew ever more rare.”<sup>60</sup> One of the reasons Mexican-Anglo marriages became exceedingly rare was due to the hardening of racial boundaries in American society.

Colonial, inter-colonial, and post-colonial historians argued that the study of American race and gender hierarchies, as well as the hardening of race and gender boundaries required an analysis of the colonial context. During the 1950s and 1960s colonial historians studied American colonialism as a “mere episode” in American history.<sup>61</sup> In the 1990s, colonial historians and Spanish borderlands historians argued that America’s colonial project was also present on the domestic front. According to Gordon, internal colonialism called attention to the fact that there was little ideological difference between the United States’ domestic and foreign relations. For historians of colonialism, internal colonialism represented the desire to construct comparisons with foreign colonialism and internal, or “settler” colonialism at home in the Spanish borderlands. According to Gordon, internal colonialism arose from a Marxist tradition,

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<sup>58</sup> Hyde, 109.

<sup>59</sup> Hyde, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Hyde, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and tender ties: the politics of comparison in (post) colonial studies” *Itinerario* 27, no. 3 (2003): 4.

which “came to characterize intersecting economic exploitation and political exclusion of a subordinated group that differed racially or ethnically from the dominant group—and all this within a polity rather than across oceans or borders.”<sup>62</sup> In studying the historical construction of race, colonial historians can identify the processes by which some groups became white and gained access to all of the privileges and rights which went along with such classification.

What is perhaps most interesting about Mexicans introduction to the American polity after the Mexican-American War is that the stipulations of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which granted Mexicans citizenship led a federal court to rule in 1897 that Mexicans were “white.”<sup>63</sup> According to Gordon, “the domination of the U.S. binary, black-white racial system led Mexican Americans struggling for rights and acceptance to insist that they were white.”<sup>64</sup> In looking at patterns of Mexican women’s agency in claiming familial connections to white fathers and husbands, it is easy to see how Mexican-Americans would also insist on their whiteness in such a racially-stratified and discriminatory society. Rather than being “white-washed” under assimilation, Mexican-Americans accommodated the American racialization process, which considered them white in order to protect their own economic interests. Gordon calls these acts “reaccommodation,” and urges a focus on people’s agency in negotiating conflict.<sup>65</sup>

Colonialism studies waned in the 1990’s, but the focus on comparing American colonialism with other colonial regimes did not. For post-colonial historians, like Ann Stoler, studies “turned away from how United States imperialism ‘consolidated’ North America and how empire influenced domestic policy to view American racial politics from the regions that

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<sup>62</sup> Gordon, 428.

<sup>63</sup> Gordon, 436.

<sup>64</sup> Gordon, 437.

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, 443.

were colonized.”<sup>66</sup> Like previous studies on intermarriage, post-colonial historians recognized the importance of analyzing intimate domains and how they figured into making of racial categories, which effectively buttressed imperial rule. However, post-colonial historians also examined the Spanish borderlands as a contested social and cultural space where racial classifications were both accepted and confounded by ordinary peoples.

Stoler also argues for a more global perspective in comparing the “intimacies of American empire” to other colonial regimes in regions other than Latin America. According to Stoler, comparative studies of American empire are necessary because they “may prompt a search for common strategies of rule and the sequences of their occurrence that questions the relationship between imperial expansion and nation building and that asks why sex was a politically charged “transfer point” for racisms of the state.”<sup>67</sup> As a colonial state project, the United States developed its own rules regarding interracial unions, with an emphasis more on marital rather than sexual relationships. Once again, property was of utmost concern, in that American legislators targeted interracial marriage with a greater fervor because marriage involved property obligations.<sup>68</sup> While Mexican-Anglo marriages facilitated the exchange of property into white men’s hands, anti-miscegenation laws ensured that this property stayed in white men’s hands.

The study of Mexican-Anglo marriages illuminates the ways in which Mexican women’s lives were defined not only by gender, but also the larger economic, political, cultural, and religious structures of the time. Intermarriage occurred within the bounds of American colonization, where American leaders developed specific legislation, which both encouraged interracial unions in order to gain access to Mexican land and discouraged such unions after the

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<sup>66</sup> Stoler, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Stoler, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Pascoe, “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage,” 6.

land grabbing process was complete. As historians have moved in the direction of “bottom up” history in studying oppressed groups, they have also struggled to fully recognize Mexican women’s agency due to the lack of Mexican women’s own writing. Historians, then, are faced with the task of analyzing how women made sense of and perhaps, influenced the racialization processes of the American colonial regime. Studies of intermarriage are also important in recognizing how race and gender are social constructions and how those in power assign meaning to these mutable categories in order to pursue their own imperial and domestic agendas. Debates over issues defining American culture, power, race, ethnicity, and gender require a historical understanding of how the state has historically intervened in personal matters for the sake of maintaining its policies. Ultimately, historical scholarship must examine America’s multiracial and multicultural past to inform contemporary discussions of race and gender relations.

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Fall 2014

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