

## Gender and Intimacy across the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

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**ABSTRACT** This special issue of *Pacific Historical Review*, “Gender and Intimacy across the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands,” is guest edited by Miroslava Chávez-García and Verónica Castillo-Muñoz. The articles in the collection reflect the primacy of gender and intimacy as tools of analysis in recovering the experiences of women of Spanish-Mexican and Mexican origin in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century borderlands. As the authors demonstrate, using gender and intimacy, along with race, ethnicity, class, and culture, allow for the recovery of women’s personal and family lives and how they intersected with the economic, political, and social transformations of the region. The result is nuanced understandings of how women negotiated and resisted state-based, patriarchal ideologies and practices that sought to limit their lives and those of their families. The special issue includes a preface from Marc S. Rodriguez, this introduction, and articles by Celeste Menchaca, Erika Pérez, and Margie Brown-Coronel. **KEYWORDS** intimacy, gender, borderlands, migration, Mexican women, Spanish-Mexican women, U.S.-Mexico border, California history

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In this special issue of the *Pacific Historical Review*, we invite readers to think of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a dynamic zone of convergences in which gender and intimacy play central roles in the relationships, conflicts, and tragedies that often erupt in and around the 2,000-mile boundary. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the recent turmoil faced by migrants looking for asylum from their war-torn and economically ravaged countries. Facing bone-crushing poverty, hunger, gang violence, and sexual assaults, among other difficulties, thousands of migrants—men, women, and children—have traveled in caravans to the U.S.-Mexico border seeking relief. Their intimate stories of despair, hope, and love have begun to be told and captured, revealing the complex implications of migration across multiple borders and its impact on gender, family, and the state. While these stories are revealing and poignant, we await further analyses of the ways in which

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these literal and figurative movements have shaped and reshaped a constantly shifting, living, and breathing borderlands.<sup>1</sup>

In laying the groundwork for this collection on the history of gender and intimacy across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we define gender and intimacy broadly. While we consider gender as the social and cultural roles assigned or attributed to biological males and females, we treat intimacy as an emotional and personal expression of love and desire as well as affection between two or more people that is performed or enacted across a variety of spaces, places, and relationships. As Laurent Berlant and Viviana A. Zelizer argue, intimacy is about sharing personal experiences and insights—that is, secrets, private languages, terms of endearment, interpersonal rituals, vulnerabilities, and shameful moments—between two people who have a close bond or affection. Intimacy is not confined exclusively to couples, they continue, but is cultivated among parents, grandparents, children, siblings, and friends, who tell each other stories, listen, connect, and respond. Like Berlant and Zelizer, we take on an expanded view of intimacy and also follow Ann Stoler’s lead in calling into question our assumptions about intimacy. Stoler asks us to rethink the notion that intimacy “is located primarily in the family, that the family is a ready model for, and microcosm of, the state, and that affective ties are inherently tender ones.”<sup>2</sup> Intimacy, we believe, is located within and across multiple spaces and frameworks.

We define the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a region of diverse social, political, economic, and cultural interactions, contradictions, and conflicts. Bisected by an international boundary, it encompasses and brings together diverse peoples of different genders, races, ethnicities, classes, and sexualities. In thinking about the borderlands physically, we borrow from Deborah

1. For stories of the migrant caravans and the men, women, and children who make up these transnational movements, see, for instance, *Humanizando La Deportación*, <http://humanizandola.deportacion.ucdavis.edu/en/>, accessed July 23, 2019; Jody S. Cohen, Melissa Sánchez, and Duaa Eldeib, “Here is What Happened to the 99 Immigrant Children Separated from their Parents and Sent to Chicago,” *ProPublica*, September 10, 2018; Emily Cochrane and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “New Details of Family Separations Fuel Emotional Hearing,” *The New York Times*, July 19, 2019; and Office of Inspector General, “Management Alert—DHS Needs to Address Dangerous Overcrowding and Prolonged Detentions of Children and Adults in the Rio Grande Valley (Redacted),” Home Land Security, OIG 19-51, July 2, 2019.

2. Lauren Berlant, “Intimacy: A Special Issue,” *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (Winter 1998): 281–88; Berlant, ed., *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Purchase of Intimacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14–15; and Ann Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 16.

Boehm's argument that "borderlands extend to the many places where transnational Mexicans live that may be thousands of miles from the border, locations in both Mexico and the United States."<sup>3</sup> In Boehm's conception, North Carolina as well as New Mexico and Texas form part of the borderlands. Such an expansive approach is generative, as it allows us to delineate the transnational family links forged across a broader hemispheric region, reaching into Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central America, and beyond. In thinking about the borderlands culturally, we lean on queer Tejana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, who reminds us that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is a source for new life forms, ideas, and cultures. To Anzaldúa, the border is "*una herida abierta*," an open wound, "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture."<sup>4</sup>

In such renderings, we see the borderlands as a significant place and space of intersecting nodal points in which meanings about intimate, personal, male, and female roles and relations are constructed, contested, and reconfigured in new ways. Gender and intimacy, we argue, provide us with powerful lenses to unearth those reconfigurations and to recover and rewrite the histories of peoples and communities in the borderlands often neglected in historical scholarship. As the authors of this collection demonstrate, using the perspectives of conquered and conquering peoples, namely Spanish-Mexican, Mexican, and Mexican American women, generally silenced in the literature, yields new insights about the immediate and longterm impact of war, violence, and the redrawing of the U.S.-Mexico border on social and family relations and culture.<sup>5</sup> Such an approach enables us, too, to recover the

3. Deborah Boehm, *Intimate Migrations: Gender, Family, and Illegality among Transnational Mexicans* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

4. Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987).

5. Studies on Spanish-Mexican, Mexican, and Mexican American women in the Spanish colonial, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries have expanded recently into a rich historiography. See, for instance, Ana María Alonzo, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995); Virginia Mayo Bouvier, *Women and the Conquest of California, 1542–1840: Codes of Silence* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); María Raquel Casas, *Married to the Daughter of the Land: Spanish-Mexican Women and Interethnic Marriage in California, 1820–1880* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2009); Antonia I. Castañeda, *Three Decades of Engendering History: Selected Works of Antonia I. Castañeda* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2014); Miroslava Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest: Gender and Power in California, 1770s to 1880s* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Deena González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of New Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jean Farr McDonald, *Juana Briones of Nineteenth-Century California*

emotional bonds built and maintained, often weakened but not destroyed in battles over imperialist expansion and national sovereignty. While focused on the displacements, struggles, and losses, the conquered populations confronted in the rapid shift from Mexican to U.S. rule in 1848, the narratives in this collection are more than stories of victimization. Rather, they convey Spanish-speaking women's resilience, resistance, and creativity in negotiating their changing environment and finding new ways to adapt to a land they once called—and continue to call—home.

### STATE POWER IN THE BORDERLANDS

Depicted as a fluid space in which cultures and ideas often overlap, blur, and lead to the formation of new cultural practices and beliefs, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, as the authors in this collection reveal, straddle a political boundary demarcating two independent nation states with the power to enact and enforce a corpus of rules and regulations. As these articles demonstrate, nowhere else is the power of the state experienced so intensely as at the border where national interests are protected and preserved intently. In her pathbreaking study of unaccompanied, single women at the U.S.-Mexico border in the early 1900s, Celeste Menchaca demonstrates that the state is constantly present in the intimate, personal, and family lives of Mexican women who seek to cross national boundaries in hopes of building social and economic security for themselves and their families. Her work shows, too, the highly discretionary power of U.S. border inspectors—those who reviewed cases held up for special inquiry—to approve or deny Spanish-speaking women's efforts to migrate to el norte. Suspecting the single women had intentions to cross the border to work in brothels located in El Paso and beyond or to in other ways engage in non-normative gender roles, the border inspectors pried women's private lives, probing their personal motivations and intimate relationships as well as their sexuality to determine if they subscribed to what state officials believed to be immoral lives. As a consequence of immigration laws devised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, persons entering the United States and suspected as "likely to become a public charge" or "arrested for any other immoral purpose,"

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(Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008); Erika Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies: Interethnic Kinship, Sexuality, and Marriage in Southern California, 1769–1885* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018); and Bárbara O. Reyes, *Private Women, Public Lives: Gender and the Missions of the Californias* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

including prostitution, faced denied admittance. While border officials could not prove prostitution or other immoral dealings without evidence, they succeeded in blocking women's entrance based on their perceived economic needs. When questioned about their intentions in crossing, the women denied engaging in illicit behavior, even though the border inspectors refused to believe them.

Border officials' racial and gender assumptions of Mexican women as sexually loose and immoral rendered the women inadmissible even before they attempted to cross the border. Indeed, Mexican women traveling without men protecting or vouching for their morality and sexuality as virtuous wives, mothers, and sisters, the white male border inspectors reasoned, figured as highly suspicious for being potentially dependent economically on the state for support. The border inspectors summarily rejected the women's bids to immigrate lawfully to the United States and singled them out for exclusion. Denied entrance but not deterred, the women returned to Mexico, planning the next opportunity to try their luck at crossing the border. Through these little-known and little-studied border narratives, Menchaca reveals the challenges single women confronted in dealing with a state that rendered them as highly suspect and inadmissible bodies.<sup>6</sup>

Authors Erika Pérez and Margie Brown-Coronel also examine and analyze the impact of the state on Spanish-speaking women but do so for the nineteenth century with the imposition of U.S. sovereignty in 1848, with the attendant social, political, economic, cultural, and legal changes brought about by the new regime. While scholars have spent several decades examining the impact of the U.S. conquest on the Spanish-Mexican, Mexican, and Native peoples in the region, few have studied their direct effect on gender and women's roles and relations in the family, community, and larger society. A small, growing body of literature demonstrates the creative ways Spanish-speaking women and their families responded to the violent takeover as well as the gender, racial, ethnic, and class ideologies that reshaped their society

6. For other approaches to the study of Mexican women at the border, see, for instance, Grace Peña Delgado, "Border Control and Sexual Policing: White Slavery and Prostitution along the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, 1903-1910," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 43 (Summer 2012): 157-78; Ann R. Gabbert, "Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 12 (October 2003): 575-604; Ana E. Rosas, *Abrazando el Espíritu: Bracero Families Confront the US-Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); and Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

and their identities within that society.<sup>7</sup> Pérez and Brown-Coronel add to that understanding by examining how some Spanish-Mexican women managed to negotiate successfully the new English-speaking, Euro-American dominated, capitalist order. While the redrawing of the U.S.-Mexico border created dire challenges for peoples of Mexican-descent who, overnight, like the Native peoples before them, became “foreigners in their native land,” some elite women, Pérez and Brown-Coronel reveal, found economic and personal success in navigating the new environment.<sup>8</sup>

For the woman at the heart of Brown-Coronel’s study, Josefa del Valle, the eldest daughter of a prominent *Californio* family, the shift in sovereignty from Mexican to U.S. rule resulted in a series of economic, geographic, and social transformations that, although threatening to her family’s livelihood, provided windows of opportunity allowing her to adapt successfully. Brown-Coronel’s narrative begins shortly after del Valle’s birth in 1861. That year, the family sold their properties in the pueblo of Los Angeles—where they had lived for decades—and moved to Rancho Camulos, fifty miles north of town, in present-day Ventura County, as a result of growing economic pressures from increasing Euro-American settlers and real estate investors looking to acquire property, particularly land for development. Sensing the dwindling opportunities in cattle production and rising interests in the agricultural industry, the del Valles shifted the focus at Rancho Camulos from a ranching to farming economy. Access to relatively inexpensive laborers, namely displaced Native peoples and unemployed Mexican immigrants as well as a secure water supply, allowed the family to maintain a semblance of economic prosperity for many years. Reared as an elite member of society, del Valle enjoyed all the comforts associated with an upper-class upbringing, despite the impoverishment and marginalization of many Californio families among them. When her father died, however, del Valle turned her attention

7. For studies on the impact of the U.S. conquest on gender and women specifically, see, for instance, Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land*; Chávez-García, *Negotiating Conquest*; and Pérez, *Colonial Intimacies*. For first-person narratives and other creative responses to the war, see, for example, Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M. Senkewicz, eds., *Testimonios: Early California through the Eyes of Women, 1815–1848* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015); and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, *The Squatter and the Don*, edited and introduced by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1997).

8. The reference to “foreigners in their native land” comes from David J. Weber, *Foreigners in Their Native Land: Historical Roots of the Mexican Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), which charts the experience of the U.S. conquest on peoples of Mexican descent. Weber provides little attention to gender, however.

to overseeing the rancho and taking over household affairs when her mother was away. Undeterred by the new responsibilities, del Valle committed herself to the family's continued stability, even if it cost her the opportunity to cultivate her own household, which she also desired. Indeed, as her correspondence indicates, del Valle longed for the companionship and intimacy a stable marriage and family could provide, but family and economic pressures kept her tied to Rancho Camulos. The intimacy conveyed in the letters, Brown-Coronel argues, gives us "a sense of how conquest percolated into intimate settings such as in family and couples' relationships" and in "everyday life[, reminding] us that the impact of conquest seeped across multiple spaces for Spanish-Mexican women."

While the U.S. conquest and resulting transformations forced Josefa del Valle and her family to devise new ways to maintain their family, Pérez demonstrates that for the Dalton-Zamorano clan, a bi-ethnic household forged through the marriage of the Englishman Henry Dalton and the Spanish-Mexican Guadalupe Zamorano, the imposition of a new political order in the mid-nineteenth century brought about a wide range of social, economic, and cultural changes. While some members of the family found avenues for social integration and upward mobility, others felt the brunt of exclusionary racial, ethnic, and class practices, leading them to fall on hard times. For the patriarch, Henry Dalton, the U.S. conquest meant fighting to protect family properties from squatters who unlawfully claimed the land. As Pérez demonstrates, the constant litigation and exorbitant legal fees eventually took their toll, leading to property loss and bankruptcy, forcing Dalton, Zamorano, and their children to find alternative means of survival.

Survival, however, varied across gender and generational lines. While Dalton considered leaving California and moving to Mexico to claim land he had been awarded for his service to the Mexican government, his bi-ethnic daughters sought their own path for economic independence. Rather than leave their native country, they married Euro-American men and did so without expressed parental consent. Contrary to their family's wishes and the common practice among nineteenth-century Californio families of obtaining parental permission, the assertive daughters used strategic marriages to establish a semblance of stability for themselves and their households.

Their brothers, however, also bi-ethnic, were less successful in marrying Euro-American women. Gendered racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies as well as the skewed sex ratio, competition over marriage partners, and shifting economic patterns made it difficult for them, as males, to find and marry

eligible Euro-American females. Instead, the men left their homes for other parts of the Southwest and Mexico where some of them married Mexican women. Racism, fierce competition in the wage economy, landlessness, and business failures, as Pérez demonstrates, left them nearly impoverished. Despite these setbacks, the Dalton-Zamorano family managed to forge ahead into the twentieth century with some factions of the family experiencing economic success and social integration, while others faced financial difficulties, marginalization, and impoverishment.

### SEXUAL LABOR IN THE BORDERLANDS

Spanish-speaking women's sexual labor, that is, the deployment of women's bodies, sexuality, and reproductive capacities for remuneration and, in some cases, profit is another central theme threading the essays. Mirroring the history of gender and sexuality throughout Latin America, as Asunción Lavrin, Patricia Seed, Ramón Gutiérrez, and Ann Twinam, among others have shown, sex and gender were central to the development of Spanish-speaking communities throughout New Spain, including the borderlands.<sup>9</sup> As the authors in this collection reveal, fathers, spouses, siblings, and state officials—the majority male—sought to control, contain, and manage women's sexual labor in and outside the family and community. Controlling women's reproduction was not a new development in the nineteenth century. Rather, its origins in New Spain's northernmost frontier dates to the Spanish conquest and colonization of the region and the need to populate and defend Spain's northern territory in the face of advancing adversaries, including Native peoples and foreigners, namely Europeans. Indeed, as Antonia Castañeda, Bárbara Reyes, and Ramon Gutiérrez have shown, natural reproduction formed a core of Spanish efforts to maintain authority in the region,

9. For studies on gender and sexuality in colonial Latin America, see, for instance, Sylvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790–1857* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Asunción Lavrin, ed., *Marriage and Sexuality in Colonial Latin American* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away, 1500–1846* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Pete Sigal, *From Moon Goddesses to Virgins: The Colonization of Yucatecan Maya Sexual Desires* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Susan Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Steve Stern, *The Secret History of Gender Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

for few colonists from either New Spain or other parts of the Spanish empire were willing to migrate to and settle in the inhospitable zone for little gain.<sup>10</sup> Women's capacity to expand the population, by having large families, therefore remained central to the stability and vitality of the immediate and future Spanish-speaking communities and the Spanish empire in the Americas.

Authors Pérez and Brown-Coronel both demonstrate the central role of women and marriage to the expansion and stability of families and communities in Alta California. For many California- and foreign-born men with interests in wealth and political power in California, marriage to elite, propertied Spanish-Mexican women or Californianas, proved profitable. These nuptials allowed foreigners such as Abel Stearns, who married Arcadia Bandini, the daughter of a prominent propertied family in San Diego, to acquire sizable ranchos, or large tracts of lands awarded to soldiers and others in the service of the Spanish crown and, later, of the Mexican government.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as Pérez argues, marriage was not just about strategic alliances but also a desire for companionship, sexual comfort, and domestic labor. For Dalton, a forty-seven-year-old naturalized Mexican citizen and Englishman by birth, his marriage to Zamorano, a fifteen-year-old California-born woman, was likely not motivated by financial gain, as he held his own property—Rancho Azusa—before he married Zamorano, who was an orphan with few means at her disposal at the time of the ceremony. Those nuptials, nevertheless, allowed them to forge a well-established family and build an extensive social network.

The ability to control and contain women's bodies proved central not only to Spain's and, later, Mexico's efforts to grow their communities but also to the United States and its effort to promote and maintain a predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon population, free of racial contamination from what it saw as mixed-race, degenerate peoples viewed such as Mexicans. The exclusion of what were seen as potentially diseased and racially and biologically inferior peoples at the U.S.-Mexico border is a theme scholars have explored with some success. Alexandra Minna Stern, John McKiernan-González, and Grace Peña Delgado, among others, have examined the ways in which U.S. medical officials at the border identified Mexicans, Chinese, and other non-white immigrants as carriers of diseases that threatened the

10. Castañeda, *Engendering History*; Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*; and Reyes, *Private Women, Public Lives*.

11. For more on the economic gains of these marriages, see Casas, *Married to a Daughter of the Land*.

larger population.<sup>12</sup> As Stern has shown, the death of medical officials in the early 1910s with the outbreak of typhus at the El Paso, Texas, border crossing, led to fear, panic, and a near closure of the border entrance for worry of contamination by Mexicans. Few of these authors have, however, examined specifically how and why women were targeted for exclusion.

Menchaca's essay demonstrates that in the early 1900s, U.S. border inspectors sought to deny single, unaccompanied women's access to the United States, believing they were economically dependent and intended to work in brothels and thereby contribute to the degradation of U.S. society. More specifically, border inspectors feared the women's presence would lead not only to moral decline but also to physical decay through the spread of diseases associated with Mexicans, which they believed were inherent among the women. Border inspectors worked relentlessly, Menchaca argues, to probe and pry women's intimate, sexual encounters in an effort to deny their entrance and contain the threat to the nation that their sexual labor and bodies represented.

#### **MOBILITY, RESISTANCE, AND RESILIENCE IN THE BORDERLANDS**

Despite the power of the state in regulating women's sexual labor and sexuality and its authority in limiting women's ability to traverse social, cultural, and political boundaries in and across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Spanish-speaking women's strategies to forge ahead with their intended goals demonstrate their mobility, adaptability, and resilience. Menchaca shows that the women in her study used ingenious approaches in getting the men with power over their immediate lives to bend to their desires. In a careful analysis of the verbal and non-verbal exchange between the border inspectors and the single women who hoped to cross into the United States, Menchaca uncovers the strategies the women deployed to convince the officials of the morality in their intentions. As Menchaca reveals, these women used the interrogation rooms and interviews creatively to dodge the inspectors' line of questioning and to construct an alternative narrative of their migratory journeys. In the process, the women developed new identities for themselves, expecting these

12. John Mckiernan-González, *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas-Mexico Border, 1848-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Grace Peña Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusions in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); and Alexandra M. Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79 (Feb. 1999), 41-81.

identities would provide them admission and residence in el norte. In the process, they cast themselves as respectable wives, devoted mothers, aggrieved and honorable women, and hard-working laborers. As Menchaca argues, the women displayed a keen sense of resourcefulness in their ability to develop strategies to deal with their circumstances and to express, state, or build their own subjectivities in the face of the state's attempt to stamp them as inadmissible. While most used social roles and identities of respectability, others turned to racial and gender stereotypes to achieve their own goals.

Spanish-speaking women in nineteenth-century California deployed similar approaches to navigate their highly circumscribed, patriarchal social and political worlds. Among the Dalton-Zamorano family, second generation bi-ethnic women used marriage to Euro-American men and social adaptation and integration to maintain and, in some cases, ascend the social hierarchy. While their bi-ethnic brothers struggled in the new racial and economic order, the women used their advantages in the marital market for their own benefit. For the del Valle women, adapting to the new economic order and marrying a financially stable Euro-American man, among other strategies, allowed Josefa del Valle to maintain her family's status and wealth amidst a rapidly shifting social, economic, political, legal, and cultural landscape. When the women's worlds were on the verge of collapse, through massive economic restructuring and misfortunes, deaths of leading family members, and shifting cultural and legal terrains, these women took matters into their hands and learned how to live in their new society. While some assumed the business affairs of the family, others adapted the English language and formed extended family and social networks that allowed them to solidify their holdings and standing in their families and larger community.

Together the articles in this special issue attest to how women challenged the gender, racial, ethnic, and class ideologies that sought to marginalize and confine them as economically and socially powerless beings in and across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By mobilizing their personal, cultural, and economic resources, whether meager or plentiful, women resisted the assaults leveled against them and deployed their own strategies, enabling them to maintain themselves and their families. These articles demonstrate women's adaptability and resourcefulness in their adoption and display of multifaceted identities as migrants, residents, citizens, and deportees as well as mothers, sisters, partners, and wives. For women in the nineteenth century, especially *Californianas*, female members of the propertied *Californio* elite, they turned to marriage, family networks, and the law to hold on to their property

holdings in the aftermath of the American conquest in 1848. For those in the twentieth century, particularly migrant women, who were cast as unwanted, tainted, and potentially contaminated and deviant bodies who needed regulation, they redeployed their identities as honest mothers and hardworking laborers to assure their safe passage to el norte. Even for those with lawful status, migration was not an easy prospect, yet they persisted in reaching their goals even if it took years.

As the articles in this special issue indicate, using gender and intimacy as a lens to study the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and beyond provides a wide range of possibilities for recovering and rewriting the histories of marginalized peoples, including that of Spanish-Mexican, Mexican, and Mexican American women. By examining gender—the socially constructed nature of men’s and women’s roles—we can understand how social roles and relations are delineated across a culturally diverse and diffused space of the borderlands. By interrogating intimate relations, those encounters and relationships between spouses, family members, and friends, we can also understand how even the most intimate of spaces are impacted by political boundaries and racial ideologies seeking to contain and maintain perceived threats to the national body. By developing innovative interdisciplinary methodologies, the authors show that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is a dynamic and changing field. We hope that this body of work serves as an invitation to others to explore the rich and diverse experiences located at the intersections of the international Mexican and American border. ■

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