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From the Guest Editor's Desk

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From the Guest Editor's Desk:

The four articles contained in this issue of the *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* provide an important discussion of the intersections of gender, religion, and sexuality. In the first two articles, by Nancy E. van Deusen and Kathleen A. Myers, religious practices and institutions and their effects on, and opportunities for, women's lives furnish the focus. For Dedra S. McDonald and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, issues of transgression and sexual assault provide the data for an examination of gender relations and women's options within prevailing gender ideologies. All of the articles, moreover, show the profound relationship between all of these themes. Each article demonstrates the ways in which prevailing ideas about gender and gender right, not exclusively but often religious in inspiration, influenced not only women's behavior but also their voices and their silences, the parameters of their existence, and even the images that they held of themselves. These voices, behaviors, and images were mediated through official male structures of power and control, both civil and ecclesiastical. They were also mediated through society and family, as gender ideologies were perpetuated and reproduced far beyond official institutions of authority. However, the power over women held by men through institutions or within families was by no means absolute. The discussions presented here make clear that women questioned, negotiated, struggled, and found space for themselves.

The selections offered here are drawn from diverse parts of colonial Spanish America: urban Peru, central Mexico, and the northern periphery of New Spain. They also present cases from a diverse class and ethnic pool and from both urban and rural areas. The women who emerge as individuals range from intellectuals associated with the highest levels of the viceroy's court in Mexico to "rustic" women in the vicinity of El Paso. Still, certain themes emerge strongly, presenting the possibility of at least tentative conclusions.

In her article, "Defining the Sacred and the Worldly: *Beatas* and *Recogidas* in Late-Seventeenth-Century Lima," Nancy E. van Deusen presents a powerful image of the Virgin Mary as the Immaculate Conception, leading the first women into the recently established Casa de Las Amparadas in Lima—although it is important to note that the women were at the end of the line, behind male authorities from the civil and religious hierarchy. Mary certainly provided the most

dominant vision of the ideal woman in colonial Latin America. An ambiguous image at best, presenting a model of a virgin mother impossible for other women to match, the vision of Mary nevertheless became a nurturing and powerful presence for many, both male and female. A desire to follow the path of Mary might both empower and disempower women. While women wishing to maintain their aloofness from male society might seek out either convents or *beaterios* (those liminal spaces between the secular and the sacred), other women were subject to controls over their sexuality which sought to confine intercourse to marriage and defined family honor as at least partly a function of female fidelity within marriage.

Van Deusen shows that the development of *beaterios* was related to a desire by men—officials or family members—to control women's sexual behavior. It was also related, however, to a desire by the women themselves for a space in which to be aloof from and, sometimes, protected from men. She discusses the idea of *recogimiento*, which, similarly to ideas of honor, was seen as virtuous and involved "modest, controlled behavior, and a retiring or quiescent nature..." (p. 449). *Recogimiento* also indicated enclosure, voluntary or otherwise, within the home or in an institutional setting. The florescence of *beaterios* in seventeenth-century Lima coincided with a similar burgeoning of popular religion, as well as a startling demographic preponderance of women in the city. Santa Rosa of Lima was canonized in 1671, significant both for the outpouring of public joy and support as well as for its recognition of the spirituality of a Peruvian woman. The times seem to have been right for the development of spaces where women could seek not only "protection and asylum in a sacred space" away from men, but also could develop and explore their spirituality.

Kathleen A. Myers' work, "The Mystic Triad in Colonial Mexican Nuns' Discourse: Divine Author, Visionary Scribe, and Clerical Mediator," also deals with women and the sacred within a framework dominated by men. She studies "writing women," all of whom wrote for or were literary subjects of men who were their spiritual mentors or, at least, had a role in defining the parameters of their work. Her "mystic triad" is composed of "religious woman as vehicle, male clergy as mediator, and God as ultimate author..." (p. 480). Myers chooses to examine the writings of and about three religious women in seventeenth-century central Mexico, all of whom

were associated in one way or another with the well-known bishop of Puebla, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz. She shows the way in which the texts produced by and about these three women—the literary and intellectual Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the mystic Madre María de San José, and the illiterate Asian lay holy woman Catarina de San Juan, who is the subject of two biographies discussed in this article—were profoundly affected by "dynamics of institutional power and gender..." (p. 480). Not even the most powerful and well connected of these, Sor Juana, could do less than censor her own work. Still, new evidence shows that she struggled against the limits placed on her by her sometime confessor, Antonio Núñez de Miranda, far longer and more intensely than earlier believed. As evident in these three cases, even women with voice were severely limited and controlled by their associations with men of the cloth, particularly their confessors. The confessional relationship, in fact, was sometimes responsible for their writing at all, and, in the cases of Sor Juana and Madre María, became a contested and contentious terrain which led to extreme self-questioning and even, in the case of the former, to defiance and whispers of heresy. What is clear is that their relationships with men, although they had foregone sexual contact, were strikingly intense. In the case of Catalina, what is known of her voice at all is completely mediated through male recorders. And in all cases, the stories of these women were reoriented by the men who rewrote and reinterpreted their lives.

Dedra S. McDonald and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera shift ground, looking at extreme cases of moral and physical transgressions of men against women. The two articles, however, pursue different strategies. While McDonald looks intensively at two cases of incest on the northern periphery of New Spain just as the colonial period is about to come to an end, Lipsett-Rivera casts a wide lens, examining 108 cases over a period of more than one-hundred years in central Mexico. Both, however, show that women exercised resistance against these violations.

In the two cases she examines in her article, "Incest, Power, and Negotiation in the Spanish Colonial Borderlands: A Tale of Two Families," McDonald finds women willing and able to resist victimization by men. In delving deeply into the historical records available, she explores and permits the reader to explore the internal dynamics of two families affected by incest. Intervening authorities were civil in one case, ecclesiastical in the other. Interestingly, in the first case, the

woman bringing the situation into public view is the mother, and the man accused is the stepfather, not the natural father of the young woman involved. Moreover, it is unclear whether or not the relationship was consensual, particularly since the young woman's voice is barely discernible, mediated through that of her younger half-brother. Still, as McDonald contends, her "victimization in a coupling defined by society as evil" is obvious (p. 557). Further, the psychological violence extended to the mother. In the second case, the abuser was the natural father. Both parents, however, threatened violence either to suppress or elicit the truth, and both conspired to keep the matter from public view. Although McDonald does not identify the person or persons responsible for bringing the case before public authorities, it seems likely to this reader that the violated daughter and/or her sister—probably fearing similar violence—ultimately brought the case forward for their own protection. Both daughters spoke directly and courageously to the court, and one can hear their voices, although mediated, ringing through the case.

In her discussion in "The Intersection of Rape and Marriage in Late-Colonial and Early-National Mexico," Lipsett-Rivera shows that in the eyes of authorities, and very possibly in the eyes of families, the crime of rape was primarily directed against virginity and its association with family honor. This preoccupation led to an effort to repair the damage through marriage. Women who had been raped, however, seem to have resisted, successfully, these attempts to give them over to the power of their violators. Among the cases studied, she finds only a handful in which marriages between attacked and attacker were concluded. She sees the link between marriage and rape as deriving from both Spanish legal principles and Church doctrines and practices, rather than out of some indigenous set of beliefs and behaviors. Lipsett-Rivera writes, "...the strategy of marriage as reparation for rape was perhaps not explicitly elaborated in legal codes but Spanish officials recognized it as a reasonable solution to the problem posed by rape" (p. 570). Still, despite the concerns of state, Church, and family to repair honor through marriage, women did not go willingly into lifetime commitments to men who had treated them with violence.

Throughout the four articles presented here, themes of male authority, power, and control are set against women's agency, resistance, and self-searching. Women were willing to defend them-

selves, to pursue life courses—certainly within limits—that would best serve their own needs, to write and to behave in ways that challenged societal frameworks and gender ideologies.

Linda B. Hall
Guest Editor