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Trama de una guerra conveniente: Nueva Vizcaya y la sombra de los apaches (1748-1790) (review)

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Trama de una guerra conveniente: Nueva Vizcaya y la sombra de los apaches (1748-1790).

By Sara Ortelli. Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2007. Pp. 259. Maps. Graphs. Charts. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. \$50.00 paper.

Sara Ortelli's study provides an excellently researched and innovative monograph on the northern Mexican province of Nueva Vizcaya during the second half of the eighteenth century. The author has a three-part thesis. First, she contends that the Apache wars, considered to have begun in this central northern jurisdiction of New Spain in 1748, were exaggerated if not outright invented by military commanders and local officials who sought to demonstrate the continued urgency of their posts and sustain their privileges as colonial administrators and members of the landed and commercial elites when faced with the Bourbon administrative reforms. Second, she concludes that the indigenous bands of raiders identified as "Apaches" in the documents of the era were comprised of heterogeneous groups of mixed racial and ethnic origin. Third, she asserts that much of what was perceived as external raiding and robbery by "barbarians" constituted internal episodes of violence carried out by rustlers and native bands that had left the missions and other colonial settlements of Nueva Vizcaya to trade stolen cattle with the equestrian tribes of the northern plains.

The single most impressive achievement of this book is the web of archival research leading from Spain to the Mexican national archives to numerous state and local repositories in Jalisco, Durango, Chihuahua, Nuevo León, and Coahuila. The text weaves together specific documentary evidence with the secondary literature. Ortelli's tone and purpose is revisionist, in view of her contention that the dominant interpretation in the historiography to date is one that accepts at face value the urgent claims of imminent demise at the hands of the Apaches, which were forwarded repeatedly by northern governors and captains to viceregal and ecclesiastical authorities. The author's most striking finding is that the bands of cattle rustlers were linked commercially and through extended kinship networks to some of the leading families among the provincial elites of Nueva Vizcaya, thus placing in doubt the prominent role assigned to the Apaches in the theft of livestock and destruction of property.

The three parts of Ortelli's thesis seem to support a coherent argument, yet they raise questions in relation to the historical and anthropological literature for Nueva Vizcaya and other provinces of northern New Spain. In reference to the idea that the northern elites manufactured the Apache wars as a foil to circumvent the intentions of the Bourbon reforms, numerous scholars have demonstrated that the emerging commercial families of the eighteenth-century northern provinces—however much they may have protested—benefited from the Bourbon policies that militarized the frontier and promoted the privatization of land. It was under the Bourbon administration that these extended families expanded their networks of patronage and accumulated property. Previously published work has shown that raiding and trading were two facets of the same phenomenon related to frontier commerce, and that not all the "Apaches" so named in the documents were really Apaches. Sara Ortelli's insistence on placing the word Apache in quotation marks every time it appears in the text seems to press the point too far, diminishing the ethnic

and cultural identities of distinct groups of Athapaskan and Shoshonean peoples who created contested spaces within the northern colonies. The Apaches themselves are not the subjects of this history, nor are the Tarahumara, Tepehuan, Navajo, Comanche, or other bands of nomadic hunters and pastoralists. Ortelli did not consider the indigenous troops who manned the northern presidios and joined the Spaniards to wage war against the equestrian raiders, and she excluded from her analysis the peace encampments established in the environs of the northern presidios after 1790, whose documentation provides a rich source for ethnohistory. This is primarily an analysis of elite discourse and colonial policy, yet Ortelli's study blends social, environmental, and political history in ways that contribute new findings to the historiography of northern Mexico and engage in debate with the growing literature on the Gran Septentrión.

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FAMILY & GENDER STUDIES

Fixing Men: Sex, Birth Control, and AIDS in Mexico. By Matthew Gutmann. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Pp. xiv, 265. Illustrations. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$55.00 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

With an evocative cover photograph of a food stand selling “Cocos a la Viagra,” Matthew Gutmann’s latest volume aims to bring men and masculinity into the rich but heavily women-focused literature on sexuality and reproductive health. In being and getting “fixed,” the Oaxacan men in Gutmann’s stories are viewed through their experiences of sex, contraception, vasectomy, desire, and HIV/AIDS. The author makes his way into these intimacies by bonding with fellow laborers in Oaxaca City’s Ethnobotanical Garden, interviewing patients and providers at the state AIDS unit, and volunteering at a vasectomy clinic, along the way dispelling stereotypes of machismo, men (not) having sex with men, and Mexican male sexuality being culturally driven.

Gutmann’s anthropological insights are often striking, even as the repeated insertion of the self into the narrative can be unsettling to the historian. The issue of HIV/AIDS in Oaxaca is portrayed in all its global complexity, in contrast to the misguided, microcultural lenses employed too commonly by social and health scientists. Here we see the hopeless context of sickness and suffering deriving from the exploitation of migrant workers to the United States and the moral economy of loneliness that drives migrant men to having sex with prostitutes and perhaps other men, either directly or as “milk brothers.”

Neoliberal globalization is shown to frame the Mexican government’s privatization of and retreat from health services delivery, and its refusal to negotiate lower drug prices with big pharmaceutical companies (which Brazil, Thailand, South Africa, and other countries have done), sharply reducing the number of people who can be treated with life-extending anti-retroviral medicines. Exigencies of the global economy are also driving neglect of social conditions, exacerbating health problems generally (as well as AIDS specifically) and lead-