

around her, one directly shaped by the disruptions experienced by her generation and focused on her business and her sex.

Gertrudis Barceló was said to have controlled men and to have dabbled in local politics, but these insinuations do not form the core of her legend. Rather, reporters of her time, professional historians today, and novelists have debated her morals, arguing about her influence over political leaders and speculating about whether she was operating a brothel. . . . The negative images and anti-Mexican stereotypes in these works not only stigmatized Barceló but also helped legitimize the Euro-Americans' conquest of the region. Absorbed and reiterated by succeeding generations of professional historians and novelists, the legend of Barceló has obscured the complex reality of cultural accommodation and ongoing resistance.

Moreover, the legend evolving around Barceló affected the lives of other Spanish-Mexican women. Her supposed moral laxity and outrageous dress were generalized to include all the women of Santa Fé. Susan Shelby Magoffin, the first Euro-American woman to travel down the Santa Fé Trail, observed in 1846 that "These were dressed in the Mexican style; large sleeves, short waists, ruffled skirts, and no bustles. . . . All danced and smoked cigarittos, from the old woman with false hair and teeth [Doña Tula], to the little child."

This was not the first account of La Tules, as Barceló was affectionately called. . . . Josiah Gregg [see document 6], a trader during the 1830s, said that La Tules was a woman of "loose habits," who "roamed" in Taos before she came to Santa Fé. In his widely read *Commerce of the Prairies*, Gregg linked local customs—smoking, gambling, and dancing—to social and moral disintegration. La Tules embodied, for him and others, the extent of Spanish-Mexican decadence.

La Tules's dilemmas predated 1846 and, at a social and economic level, portended a community's difficulties, which were not long in developing. . . . In this period, Barceló and other Spanish-Mexicans experienced the tightening grip of the Mexican state, which was bent on rooting out uncontrolled trading; but they gained a reprieve accidentally. . . . The United States chose to invade, hurling General Stephen Kearny and his troops toward the capital city.

Barceló's activities and business acumen demonstrated, despite these pressures, the *vecinos'* (residents') proven resilience and the town's characteristic adaptability. But in the 1840s Barceló also became the object of intense Euro-American scrutiny and harsh ridicule. She was an expert dealer at monte, a card game named after the *monte* (mountain) of cards that accumulated with each hand. She drew hundreds of dollars out of merchants and soldiers alike; it was the former who embellished her name and reputation, imbuing her facetiously with characteristics of superiority and eccentricity.

Josiah Gregg, the trader, first brought Barceló notoriety because his book described her as a loose woman. But Gregg also argued that money from gambling eventually helped elevate her moral character. . . . During her lifetime, she became extraordinarily wealthy, and for that reason as well, Gregg and others would simultaneously admire and disdain her.

In the face of such contradictory attitudes toward her, Barceló ventured down a trail of her own choosing. . . . As early as 1825, she was at the mining camp outside of Santa Fé, Real del Oro, doing a brisk business at monte. By the 1830s, the card dealer was back in town, enticing Euro-Americans to gamble under terms she

La Tules of Image and Reality

DEENA J. GONZÁLEZ

In the summer of 1846, Doña Gertrudis [*sic*] Barceló stood at an important crossroad. Exempted from the hardships and tribulations endured by the women around her, Barceló had profited enormously from the "gringo" merchants and itinerant retailers who had arrived in Santa Fé after the conquest. The town's leading businesswoman, owner of a gambling house and saloon, and its most unusual character, Barceló exemplified an ingenious turnaround in the way she and others in her community began resolving the problem of the Euro-American. . . . Barceló also epitomized the growing dilemma of dealing with newcomers whose culture and orientation differed from hers.

Since 1821, people like Barceló had seen traders enter their town and change it. But local shopkeepers and vendors had done more than observe the developing marketplace. They had forged ahead, establishing a partnership with the adventurers who brought manufactured items and textiles to Santa Fé while exporting the products of Nuevo México, including gold, silver, and equally valuable goods. . . .

Barceló's life and activities were indisputably anchored in a community shaped by a changing economy, as well as by other political, social, and cultural demands. . . . Moreover, by 1846, she would become the female object of the . . . most exaggerated misunderstandings bred by such complicated frontier situations. The exaggerations have been examined from several perspectives; but standard works have failed to assess the role that sex and gender played in discussions of Barceló's business and personality. The outcome has been the creation of a legend

Deena J. González, "La Tules of Image and Reality: Euro-American Attitudes and Legend Formation on a Spanish-Mexican Frontier," in Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera, eds., *Building with Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies*. University of California Press, 1992. Copyright © 1992

prescribed. At her saloon, she served the men alcohol as she dealt rounds of cards. Controlling consumption as well as the games, Barceló accommodated the newcomers, but on her own terms. "Shrewd," Susan Shelby Magoffin, wife of the trader Samuel Magoffin, called Barceló in 1846. . . .

When Barceló died in 1852, she was worth over ten thousand dollars, a sum twice as high as most wealthy Spanish-Mexican men possessed and larger than the average worth of Euro-Americans in Santa Fé. Her properties were extensive: she owned the saloon, a long building with large rooms, and she had an even larger home not far from the plaza. She made enough money to give generously to the church and to her relatives, supporting families and adopting children. Military officers claimed that she entertained lavishly and frequently.

Dinners, dances, gambling, and assistance to the poverty-stricken elevated Barceló to a special place in New Mexican society, where she remained throughout her life. The community respected her. . . . Even her scornful critics were struck by how well received and openly admired the woman with the "red hair and heavy jewelry" was among Santa Fé's "best society." . . .

Barceló's gambling and drinking violated the rigid codes organizing appropriate female behavior, but such behavior was not the key to her distinctiveness. Rather, her success as a businesswoman and gambler gave her a unique independence ordinarily denied women. . . .

. . . Barceló cleverly crossed social and sexual barriers to gamble, make money, buy property, and influence politicians, but she avoided marginality. She did not regard herself as a marginal woman, nor was she necessarily marginalized, except by Euro-Americans. She was unusual and she was mocked for it, but not by her own people. In fact, her life and legend are interesting precisely because, in the eyes of observers, she came to represent the worst in Spanish-Mexican culture while, as a Spanish-Mexican, she mastered the strategies and methods of the Americanizers; she achieved what they had professed in speeches and reports originally to want for all New Mexicans.

Barceló's life and her legend contradict . . . notions of marginality in a situation of conquest. In their writings, conquerors maligned and ostracized her. The opinions they expressed and the images they drew of her sealed her legend in the popular imagination, because their works were distributed throughout the United States. Translated into several languages, Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies* was reprinted three times between 1844, when it first appeared, and 1857. Thousands of readers learned through him of the "certain female of very loose habits, known as La Tules." . . . Dancing, drinking, and gambling—the order was often changed according to how much the writer wanted to emphasize licentious behavior—gave these Protestant travelers pause, and they quickly made use of the observations to fictionalize Barceló's, and all women's, lives. . . .

. . . Yet Barceló was hardly the excessive woman the travelers depicted. Instead, she became pivotal in the achievement of their conquest. Worth thousands of dollars, supportive of the army, friendly to accommodating politicians. Barceló was in the right place to win over Spanish-Mexicans for the intruders. Using business and political skills, she made the saloon the hub of the town's social and economic life, and at the hall she kept abreast of the latest political developments. Politicians and military officers alike went there seeking her opinion, or involved her in their discussions about trade or the army. As adviser

and confidante, she took on a role few other women could have filled. If she existed on the fringes of a society, it was because she chose to place herself there. . . .

Such caricatures denied her contributions to the economy and the society. Had she not been a gambler, a keeper of a saloon, or a woman, she might have been praised for her industry and resourcefulness, traits that antebellum Americans valued in their own people. But from the point of view of the writers, the admirable qualities of a woman who lived by gambling and who was her own proprietor would have been lost on Protestant, middle-class readers. . . . It became easier to reaffirm their guiding values . . . by making La Tules a symbol of Spanish-Mexican degeneracy or an outcast altogether. . . .

. . . The aspersions heaped on Barceló . . . created an image that fit the Euro-Americans' preconceptions about Spanish-Mexicans. Thus described to the readers, the image of Barceló in the travel documents merely confirmed older, pernicious stereotypes. . . . Historians and others have traced a . . . critical stage in the development of anti-Mexican fervor to the antebellum period, when expansionist dreams and sentiments . . . gave rise to a continued confusion about Spanish-Mexican culture. Not only travelers from the United States but residents in general harbored deep prejudices toward Spanish-Mexicans. . . .

Racial slurs and derogatory comments about Mexicans appeared regularly in the *Congressional Record*, in newspapers, and . . . in travel accounts. Speeches and statements consistently equated brown skin with promiscuity, immorality, and decay. Albert Pike, who arrived in New Mexico from New England in 1831, called the area around Santa Fé "bleak, black, and barren." . . . The chronicler of a military expedition to New Mexico in the 1840s, Frank Edwards, said that all Mexicans were "debased in all moral sense" and amounted to little more than "swarthy thieves and liars." The same judgments were made later, long after the war had ended, and reflect the persistence of the same thinking. The historian Francis Parkman argued that people in the West could be "separated into three divisions, arranged in order of their merits; white men, Indians, and Mexicans; to the latter of whom the honorable title of 'whites' is by no means conceded." In the same period, William H. Emory of the boundary commission declared that the "darker colored" races were inevitably "inferior and syphilitic." . . .

To the Protestant mind, nothing short of the complete elimination of gambling would lift New Mexicans out of their servility and make them worthy of United States citizenship. . . . Yet initial misgivings about Barceló and the games passed after many entertaining evenings at the gambling house. Once soldiers and others began going there, they lingered, and returned often. Deep-seated anti-Mexican feelings and moralistic judgments gave way to the profits that awaited them if they won at monte, or the pleasures to be savored each evening in Santa Fé even if they lost.

At the numerous tables that lined Barceló's establishment, men who could not speak Spanish and people who did not understand English learned a new language. Card games required the deciphering of gestures and facial expressions but did not depend on any verbal communication. Soldiers and travelers new to Santa Fé understood easily enough what was important at the gaming table. Over cards, the men and women exchanged gold or currency in a ritual that emblazoned their meetings with new intentions. Drinking, cursing, and smoking, the soldiers and

others unloaded their money at the table; if Barceló profited, they lost. . . . The stakes grew larger at every turn, and many dropped away from the table to stand at the bar. Barceló's saloon took care of those who did not gamble as well as those who lost. Sometimes a group of musicians arrived and began playing. Sometimes women—who, if not gambling, had been observing the scene—cleared a space in the long room, and dancing began.

Barceló did more than accommodate men by inviting them to gamble. She furthered their adjustment to Santa Fé by bringing them into a setting that required their presence and money. At the saloon, the men were introduced to Spanish-Mexican music, habits, and humor. They could judge the locals firsthand, and could observe a community's values and habits through this single activity. After they had a few drinks, their initial fears and prejudices gradually yielded to the relaxed, sociable atmosphere of the gambling hall.

In the spring of 1847, Lieutenant Alexander Dyer first visited the saloon. By June, his journal listed attendance at no fewer than forty fandangos and described numerous visits to La Tules' saloon. . . . Dyer's "Mexican War Journal" leaves the distinct impression that a soldier's life, for those of his stripe, involved a constant round of entertainment; visits and parties at Barceló's hall were part of an officer's busy social life.

Thus, rhetoric about gambling or cavorting lessened with time. If visitors did not entirely accept the sociable atmosphere, they were sufficiently lonely for Euro-American women and companionship to go to Barceló's saloon and attend other events to which they were invited. . . .

Court cases offer other impressions of how sojourning Euro-Americans changed their organizing concepts and values. . . .

Investigations in these records delineate the onset of the newcomers' accommodation. Barceló was not the only one practicing accommodation; it worked in two directions. Whether obeying the community's laws or breaking them, new men were adjusting to life away from home. Santa Fé modified the settling Euro-Americans, at times even the sojourning ones, and Barceló had begun to socialize them in the traditions of an older settlement. The people of the Dancing Ground continued their practice of accepting newcomers, particularly those who seemed able to tolerate, if not embrace, the community's religious and secular values.

At the same time, the conquering soldiers were armed . . . with purpose and commitment. Military men brought plans and realized them: a fort above the town was begun the day after Kearny marched into Santa Fé. Soldiers built a two-story-high flagstaff, and the imposing structure on the plaza attracted visitors from the Dancing Ground, who came supposedly to admire it, but probably also were there to assess the military's strength. . . . Soldiers hailed these crowning achievements as signs of blessings from God to a nation destined to control the hemisphere, but locals were not so pleased.

A new wave of resistance derailed Barceló's efforts to help resettle Euro-Americans in Santa Fé. Nevertheless, even after her death in 1852, Barceló's legend continued to indicate that her role extended beyond the immediate helping hand she had lent Euro-Americans. No documents written by her, except a will, have survived to tell whether she even recognized her accomplishment. . . . Her

wealth would suggest that she might have harbored an understanding of her influential status in the process of colonization. One fact remains . . . : beginning with her, the accommodation of Euro-Americans proceeded on several levels. Barceló had inaugurated the first, at the gambling hall, and she set the stage . . . for the second, when women began marrying the newcomers.

But as one retraces the original surrounding tensions—deriving from the steady and continuing presence of traders, merchants, and soldiers—and juxtaposes them against Barceló's achievement as an architect of a plan that reconciled the Euro-American to Santa Fé, the realities of displacement and encroachment must not be forgotten. Lieutenant Dyer reported problems as he observed them, and he commented a year after his arrival in Santa Fé: "Still it began to be apparent that the people generally were dissatisfied with the change." In January 1847, resistors in Taos caught and scalped Governor Charles Bent, leaving him to die. In the spring, a lieutenant who had been pursuing horse thieves was murdered, and forty-three Spanish-Mexicans were brought to Santa Fé to stand trial for the crime. In October of the same year, some months after several revolts had been suppressed and their instigators hanged, Dyer reported "a large meeting of citizens at the Palace," where speakers expressed "disaffection at the course of the commissioned officers."

Local dissatisfaction and political troubles had not subsided, in spite of Barceló's work. In the late 1840s, . . . Dyer reported that "a Mexican was unfortunately shot last night by the sentinel at my store house. Tonight we have a rumor that the Mexicans are to rise and attack us." The government in Santa Fé was being forced again to come to terms with each new case of racial and cultural conflict. . . . Problems no longer brewed outside; they had been brought home by accommodated Euro-Americans.

But Barceló should not be blamed here, as she has been by some, for so many problems. She symbolized the transformations plaguing her people. She symbolized as well how an older community had handled the arrival of men from a new, young nation still seeking to tap markets and find a route to the Pacific. . . . The political and social constraints within which she existed had not disappeared as a community contemplated what to do with the strangers among them.

. . . Surrounding the Dancing Ground, stories and legends of other people resisting Americanization were about to begin, and these no longer emphasized accommodation. . . .

Yet, in New Mexico and throughout the West, resistance was giving way to Euro-American encroachment. Richard Henry Dana, traveling in California during the 1830s, mourned the seemingly wasted opportunity presented by land still in the possession of Spanish-Mexicans: "In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be!" His fellow sojourners to New Mexico concurred. What Dana and the other Euro-Americans failed to see was that the land and its communities were already in the hands of such enterprising persons as Barceló. But rather than acknowledge the truth, they disparaged her; their conquerors' minds could not comprehend her intellect, enterprise, and success. Barceló, they believed, had erred. Yet in giving herself to the conquest, but not the conquerors, she survived and succeeded. She drew betting clients to her saloon; they played but lost, she gambled and won.