

MIGRATION AND CROSS-BORDER DEVOTIONS



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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes and describes the development of new religious devotions in the Mexican northern border and the southern United States since the late 19th century. It examines the social construction of a new religious and votive space in an emerging territoriality outside traditional Mexican religious spaces and images. This emerging territoriality, based on new types of transit, permanence, and settlement in a context less weighed down with tradition led to a profound religious change and a new ritualization and symbolization of space. This article suggests that the development and dissemination of these border devotions is closely related to a previously absent element: the development and popularization of new technologies and the new uses given to communication technologies

KEYWORDS: popular religiosity, religious change, new technologies

RESUMEN: El artículo describe y analiza el surgimiento, desde fines del siglo XIX, de devociones inéditas en la frontera norte de México y el sur de Estados Unidos, para indagar acerca de la construcción social de una nueva espacialidad religiosa y votiva en esa territorialidad emergente, fuera y alejada de los espacios e imágenes religiosos tradicionales de México. Esa territorialidad emergente, elaborada a partir de los nuevos tránsitos, estancias y permanencias en un contexto menos cargado de tradiciones acarreo y permitió un profundo cambio religioso, una nueva ritualización y simbolización del espacio. El artículo sugiere que en la construcción y difusión de las devociones emergentes de la frontera tuvo mucho que ver un elemento inédito: la aparición y popularización de nuevas tecnologías y los nuevos usos de las tecnologías de comunicación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Religiosidad popular, cambio religioso, nuevas tecnologías, migración, tradiciones.

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During the final three decades of the 19th century, Mexico's northern border saw the birth of an endless array of popular devotions that had been previously absent in the Mexican religious tradition: the cult of contemporary figures who were portrayed as saints and became the focus of intense devotion, at least during their heyday. This practice might have begun with Don Pedrito Jaramillo, a Jalisco man who arrived in Olmos, Texas, and used to heal people from nearby ranches while also traveling to see patients (Malagamba, 1992). It seems to have ended in 1938 with the natural death of El Niño Fidencio and the execution of Juan Soldado. The four characters to enjoy the four most popular and resilient cults traveled through the northern states of Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tamaulipas, Arizona and the south of Texas in the United States: they were those of Teresa de Urrea, better known as «La Niña» or «La Santa de Cabora»; José de Jesús Fidencio Cíntora Constantino, known as «El Niño Fidencio»; Jesús Malverde, whose name had been Jesús Juárez Maso, and Juan Soldado, whose actual name was Juan Castillo Morales. Some of these cross-border devotions, which arose and became popular during the 19th century, lived on through the next century.

This article analyzes and describes the development of new religious devotions in the Mexican northern border and the southern United States since the late 19th century. It examines the social construction of a new religious and votive space in an emerging territoriality outside traditional Mexican religious spaces and images. This emerging territoriality, based on new types of transit, permanence, and settlement in a context less weighed down with tradition led to a profound religious change and a new ritualization and symbolization of space. This article suggests that the development and dissemination of these border devotions is closely related to a previously absent element: the development and popularization of new technologies and the new uses given to communication technologies.

THE BORDERLANDS: PERMANENCE AND NOVELTY

According to José Manuel Valenzuela, the 1846-1848 war between Mexico and the United States gave rise to «new heroes and traditions» on both sides of the border. The U.S. side saw a preponderance of war heroes associated to victory while, on the Mexican side, there were popular heroes and social fighters who «reflected the desire for resistance and payback» along with social bandits and popular saints who blossomed in a context of «social defenselessness and daily misery» (1992: 14). Cross-border relocation and the movement of people entering or leaving the area for a variety of reasons intensified between 1850 and 1880; this resulted in a new and complex social web on both sides of the border. In ad-



dition, the impulses behind these new movement patterns were closely linked to sweeping cultural transitions and social movements that had turned people into both witnesses and victims of events (close and distant), and these had irrevocably affected the direction and rhythm of their lives.

On the one hand, the borderlands had always been a corridor for different indigenous groups (particularly the Apache), all of whom found themselves turned into U.S. citizens. After the war, the armies of both nations began to systematically persecute and brutally decimate these groups, who moved freely across both sides of the border, often with bellicose intentions (Anaya, 1992; *Diario de Jalisco*, July 5, 1890). Thanks to specific treaties, Mexican and U.S. troops were allowed to cross border lines in order to «pursue hostile Indians» (*El Correo de Jalisco*, June 18, 1896). Occupied simultaneously by peaceful settlers, resistance movements, and bandits, the border became an increasingly vague boundary. The Mexican press published stories about indigenous U.S. citizens who wanted to buy land in Sonora and Baja California as well as reports on «thefts and muggings» carried out by indigenous U.S. gangs (*La Libertad*, October 20, 1898; *Diario de Jalisco*, March 14, 1890).

In Mexico, the Mayo were not faring any better than the poor hacienda laborers. Beginning in 1890, indigenous groups fought a number of rebellions under the banner of a variety of «living saints» and religious images not sanctioned by the Church (Domecq, 1992). At the same time, the old Mexican inhabitants of the region were stripped of their lands by U.S. landowners and companies, which turned them into impoverished and indebted peons (Malagamba, 1992). This was particularly true in Texas. Malagamba points out that the «nature and type of (property) organization became increasingly like that of the Mexican hacienda» (1992:67). The new border situation and the revolutionary sequels also gave birth to new regional characters such as Catarino Garza, who, having gained some fame after fighting Porfirio Díaz, «came back» as bandits engaged in criminal activities across the region and became part of the oral tradition (*La Libertad*, March 14, 1897).

The turbulence and ambiguity of borderlands tensions and struggles easily led to «seditious movements», but also to injustice and increased violence (Domecq, 1992). In 1901, the killing of a sheriff by two Mexican cattle thieves in a Texas town led to the mobilization of another sheriff and eight hundred men who, in addition to torturing a 16 year-old Mexican «farmer», visited «endless atrocities» upon «defenseless and peaceful Mexicans whose only fault was to be children of Mexico» (*La Libertad*, July 4, 1901). The Ley de Fuga or Law of Flight* was generously applied and many Mexicans ended up in U.S. jails where, according to the Mexican press (*Diario de Jalisco*, May 3, 1890; *El Correo de Jalisco*, March

* Translator's note: this type of execution allowed the prisoner to try to run away from the firing squad; if he managed to escape the bullets he was granted freedom. Survival was unlikely.



12, 1896) they were treated quite badly. On the other hand, the area was not immune to the migration waves across the United States and Latin America that began in the 1880s. Immigrants from over the world began arriving, attracted by jobs in the railway and mining industries and the possibility of colonizing lands (*Diario de Jalisco*, April 15, 1890). This was the case of large numbers of Chinese migrants who arrived in states like Sinaloa and Sonora, where fierce competition between Mexican and Chinese workers seems to have erupted (*La Libertad*, October 30, 1898; April 16, 1899). At the time, the Mexican press was concerned that Chinese immigration would be detrimental «our proletarian class» and further corrupt «the customs of our people» (*El Diario de Jalisco*, April 15, 1890). It acted in an openly racist, prejudiced and defamatory manner against Chinese immigrants. But there were other immigration waves, like those of «German families» that moved into Nuevo León and, later, Tamaulipas to grow «the fruitful cotton plant» (*Diario de Jalisco*, February 21, 1890). According to the national press, German immigration, unlike the Chinese, was to be welcomed, since Germans tended to be «sober, hard-working and respectful» (*La Libertad*, November 19, 1899).

These diverse cultural encounters also affected the religious context. In addition to the presence of foreigners who belonged to different Protestant churches, many Mexicans converted to beliefs such as Pentecostalism and even began to proselytize in the northern part of the country (Gaxiola, 1994). The Apostolic Church of Mexico spread from Los Angeles, California, into small populations in Sonora, Chihuahua, Nuevo León, and Coahuila (ib.). According to Gaxiola, «the Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian churches were all present» (1994:158) in the region of La Laguna around 1918. In 1900, the scantily populated northern states held 27% of the Mexican Protestant population; this number had grown to 32% by 1910 (Hernández, 1999). Religious change had begun.

In addition to receiving and defining the relationships between the diverse immigrant waves, borderlands populations were beginning to hone their trade. A striking example was Tijuana, a very new and small settlement that welcomed a plethora of activities condemned by Puritanism and U.S. law: bars, saloons, liquor shops, casinos, brothels, a red district, and the famous Agua Caliente Racetrack. All of these establishments were meant to attract U.S. tourists, artists, and gangsters who were served by poor and exploited Mexican workers (Valenzuela, 1992; Vanderwood, 2004). Since these small northern populations were isolated from the rest of the country and, oftentimes, from each other, they tended to defined themselves in terms of their relationship with the United States rather than Mexico.

The expansion of the U.S. railway and its links to the Mexican railroads since 1880 marked the beginning of massive Mexican labor migration to the northern border. Job opportunities in the railroads and trains, promoted and controlled by labor contractors (*enganchadores* or «hookers»), began to attract an



endless number of Mexican laborers, especially from the central-western part of the nation, into border stations where they could get easily hired to work in the United States (Durand and Arias, 2005; *La Libertad*, July 31, 1902). *Coyotaje's* horror stories, in fact, extend this far back in time (Durand and Arias, 2005). Natural and social catastrophes also drove to the north, especially Texas (*Diario de Jalisco*, September 26, 1890). Although Mexican border and national authorities complained about emigration, there was not much they could do in the face of better job opportunities, salaries, and increased security in the United States (Durand and Arias, 2005; *Diario de Jalisco*, September 26, 1890). It must be pointed out that migrants were exposed to all kinds of ill-treatment, attacks and, of course, an infinity of work-related accidents (Durand and Massey, 2001; *Diario de Jalisco*, April 30, 1890; *El Correo de Jalisco*, October 30, 1895).

During the early 20th century, the large majority (96.76%) of Mexican migrants were located in seven U.S. states where agricultural, mining or railway jobs were plentiful. More than half (56.53%) resided in Texas, where the major contracting agencies were based. Smaller numbers were to be found in California (15.22%), Arizona (13.40%), New Mexico (5.42%), Kansas (3.83%), Oklahoma (1.20%) and Colorado (1.16%; Durand and Arias, 2005). What began as a predominantly male migration soon began to include families whose aim was to return to Mexico but whose stays in the United States were difficult to delineate, particularly after the 1910 revolution that had the country in its grip for a whole decade, until 1920. According to Vanderwood (2004), migration loosened people's ties to the Church and gave way to new religious practices.

Migrants found themselves in a very different physical and social space from that which they knew and recognized: they had to work in unwelcoming and incredibly cold lands and learn to move in enormous cities of unknown geography, an even more remarkable feat for people who, in most cases, could neither read nor write. The *retablo* of Don Matías Lara, from San Luis Potosí, effectively portrays this anguish. The protagonist, lost in Chicago in 1918 and surrounded by the many buildings, roads and vehicles used to represent the city, thanks the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos for «having lighted the path he searched» (Durand and Massey, 2001). One of the many surprises encountered by these traveling peasants of profoundly Catholic convictions must have been the lack of churches, religious images, and traditions to which they were deeply linked and which, in high-risk situations involving their migration and survival in the United States, must have been direly needed. Many of them doubtlessly continued to visit, upon their return, their favorite Mexican sanctuaries in order to fulfill their promises and pay their dues, having been granted some favor while in the United States. This could happen many years after the fact, when they finally were able to return to their motherland. This, however, was not the case with all migrants. Others actively recreated and re-signified their religiosity in the new borderlands space.



INHERITED TRADITIONS

Generally speaking, early migrants shared a deep and vigorous religious culture linked to extremely old images associated to specific sanctuaries and processions, many of which had their roots in «apparitionism» (Barabás, in press). «Apparitionism», or the appearance of a sacred image (often Marian in nature), was a very common practice during the Spanish conquest and colonization and was used as a means of creating and reaffirming cults in Mexico. The interests of the colonial church and society gave way to a religious geography with hierarchic images and calendars that spanned from local devotions to expansive national cults such as that of the Virgin of Guadalupe (ib.).

This way of creating images and cults was both contrasted and contested by emerging social groups that made use of the same kinds of resources. This led, in the 19th century, to the surfacing of new regional spaces for Catholic devotion. During this time, emerging social and regional groups carried out an intense and previously unseen process of appropriation involving the votive tools and practices used to achieve spiritual conquest during colonial times (Arias, 2004). The colonial images were now joined by figures such as El Santo Niño de Atocha in Fresnillo, Zacatecas, and suffering Christs such as El Señor del Saucito in San Luis Potosí and El Señor de la Misericordia in Tepatlán, in the highlands of Jalisco. The stories of their origin, many of them created during the 19th century, are familiar to many people. Two aspects remain constant: one is the apparition of images in unexpected places and forms (e.g., the cross-shaped branches of a tree that evoked the crucified Jesus). The other is the image's willful insistence on remaining in a given site, a task it achieves by becoming too heavy to be moved or mysteriously returning to the original place after being relocated. In almost all these cases, the cult of a given image was accompanied by a feverish wave of visits that quickly turned into pilgrimages and the granting of pleas, demands, and favors the occurrence of which was registered in an endless array of votive offerings that verified and reiterated the miraculous nature of the cult figure (ib.).

It can be said that, during the 19th century, inherited spatiality became created territoriality. This was made manifest in the new priorities, social arrangements, and political interests that emerged in a tense and politically unstable context that prevented them from being expressed by traditional means (ib.). Images and votive traditions played a central role in this process of rupture with colonial spatiality and the redefinition of significant territories. Letting the images decide where they wished to settle, taking over a given territory, and endowing them with miraculous powers that immediately materialized into votive expressions was a way of legitimizing and sacralizing the settlement of a given social group that had become too alienated from the old colonial context; it was a way of catering to the needs (transit, settlement, meanings) required by the population.



These ways of creating new spaces and disseminating devotion were quite successfully employed by rural inhabitants during the 19th century. While difficult, this was not an impossible task. In most cases, these populations had more or less homogeneous traditions, resources, knowledge, and practices, which they shared insofar as the expression and recreation of religious experience was concerned. But the social, political, cultural, and religious milieus were quite different in the northern border. There the Catholic Church had little hold and lacked the historical presence it enjoyed in the rest of Mexico. The ideological context was also vastly different. The one aspect where there might have been an overlap was in the need to construct religious expressions that provided these new settlers with sense and identity.

TRADITION RECREATED

Between 1880 and 1940, the northern border saw the appearance and flourishing of two types of cult. On the one hand were living people who gained fame as saints due to their «miraculous» healing abilities. News of these miraculous healings spread quickly through the towns and ranches on both sides of the border and many people, both men and women, decided to take the trip not only to be healed but also to meet the saint and become acquainted with the places where the events took place, now turned into pilgrimage sites. This was the case with La Santa de Cabora and El Niño Fidencio, both of whom were well-known and venerated during their lives. On the other hand were dead figures who began granting miracles from beyond and whose graves became pilgrimage sites and shrines, as was the case with Jesús Malverde and Juan Soldado. They illustrate the transition from living miracle workers to dead miscreants who became objects of devotion.

Several authors have charted the lives, miracles, and tragedies of these four characters: Teresa Urrea, known as La Santa de Cabora (Domecq, 1990; 1992; Vanderwood, 1998); El Niño Fidencio (Berlanga, 1999; Monsiváis, 1992; Riley, 1996); Jesús Malverde (Lizárraga, 1998), and Juan Soldado (Valenzuela, 1992; Vanderwood, 2004). It is therefore not necessary to provide a detailed account of their lives. Rather, we can attempt a comparison and analysis. Jesús Malverde has the most ambiguous biography and might not have existed at all (Lizárraga, 1998). The other three were undoubtedly real and led sufficiently documented lives to provide the basis for our subsequent analysis.

All of these figures shared a new social reality: mobility, a significant break with the traditionally sedentary existence of most Mexicans. Things began to change during Porfirio Díaz's regime and followed the construction of the railway. La Santa de Cabora was born in 1873 in a small indigenous ranch in Ocorini, Sinaloa; she then moved to Cabora, in Sonora, Nogales and El Paso, in Texas,



and ended her days in Clifton, Arizona (Domecq, 1992; Vanderwood, 1998). El Niño Fidencio was born in 1898 in Yuriria, Michoacán and then moved to Iramuco, Guanajuato; he worked as a peon in Michoacán and Yucatán haciendas and as a ship cook for several years, until he finally arrived, in 1923, at the Espinazo hacienda, on the border between Nuevo León and Coahuila. He lived until his death (Berlanga, 1992; Monsiváis, 1992). Jesús Malverde might have been born in Jalisco around 1870 but is closely identified with Mocorito, close to the city of Culiacán, and, as a highwayman, moved constantly around the area (Lizárraga, 1998). It has been pointed out he could also have been a construction or railway worker as the railroad expanded into northern Mexico (Quiñónez, 2001). Juan Soldado was a private born in 1914 in Ixtaltepec, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca. He later found himself in the barracks of a regiment stationed in Tijuana (Valenzuela, 1992; Vanderwood, 2004). In fact, only two of these figures (La Santa de Cabora and possibly Jesús Malverde) were actually born in the borderlands. El Niño Fidencio and Juan Soldado were immigrants from the central-western and southern parts of Mexico, and it is therefore quite possible that they were brought up in a vigorous, old and traditionalist Catholic context. In any case, all four of them represent (and, at the same time, confront) the diversity of religious experiences and origins that were conflating in the space of the borderlands.

They all died before they turned 40, which was not uncommon at the time. La Santa de Cabora died at 33 of natural causes; El Niño Fidencio died at 40, of natural causes, and announced his impending death himself; Jesús Malverde was dead at 39 due to mortal wounds suffered during a clash with the law; Juan Soldado was put to death at 24 under the Ley de Fuga. With the exception of La Santa de Cabora, who was the illegitimate child of a local rural bourgeois (Domecq, 1992), they all came from lower-class and rural backgrounds (which was not unusual at the time, either). Their lives were all marked by hardship; again, not an unusual fate in that time and context. It could even be said that their hardships awakened empathy and sympathy among their followers. La Santa was born to an indigenous woman and started her life as an illegitimate child, although she was later recognized by her father; when he was 6 years old, El Niño Fidencio was either lent or gifted by his parents to a family that, according to Monsiváis, used him in «cruel and exploitative» ways (1992: 93) and remained at the mercy of his protectors (Riley, 1996); the parents of Jesús Malverde reputedly died of hunger, «victims of landowner exploitation» (Lizárraga, 1998). Nothing is known about Juan Soldado before his arrest and execution in Tijuana.

These characters are also usually portrayed as celibate and did not have children. Their sexuality was perceived as neuter, indefinite or hazy. In fact, the unambiguously infantile terms of «niño» and «niña» attached to El Niño Fidencio and La Santa de Cabora suggest an asexual and innocent condition. According to Monsiváis, El Niño Fidencio was «a physically unattractive youth, very effeminate» (1992:93). In fact, he spent his life as the foster child of the son of the widow to



whom he was either lent or gifted (Berlanga *et al.*, 1999; Riley, 1996). La Santa de Cabora remained single and it has been speculated she might have been a rape victim; she spent most of her life with her father (Domecq, 1992; Vanderwood, 1998). Although Jesús Malverde, as a bandit, might have been the exact opposite of the previous two, nothing is known about his sex life. Juan Soldado is only known to have lived with a woman in Tijuana (Vanderwood, 2004).

Quite evidently, the popularity of these four characters is closely linked to health. The need to be healed of a variety of physical and spiritual ailments was fundamental in such isolated and poor societies, which were, to a large extent, comprised of laborers and migrants who were subject to all kinds of demands and pressures. This contributed directly to the fame of these border healers, whose prescriptions were easy to find and follow and who usually charged little or nothing in exchange for their services (Malagamba, 1992; Riley, 1996). Rather, they received and accepted an endless flow of gifts proffered by their followers.

La Santa de Cabora and El Niño Fidencio lived and were well known in Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Sonora, the border states with the closest ties to Texas, the oldest Mexican laborer settlement and the destination of the first migrants. Jesús Malverde and Juan Soldado gained fame in places like Baja California and Sinaloa, which are associated to subsequent Mexican migration waves into California. La Santa de Cabora and El Niño Fidencio were seen as effective mediums that bridged the world of men and the divinity, a role that was later ascribed to Juan Soldado. Despite their popularity and their implicit and explicit reference to religious Catholic elements, the Church always rejected any ties to them.

While these figures tended to live in isolated places, these settlements could be reached by train. In fact, the railway was ever present in the lives and miraculous trajectories of these four characters.

LIVING MIRACLE WORKERS

Teresa de Urrea began her career as a miracle worker through her relationship with Huila, an old healer who was in charge of the Urrea household. Huila taught the girl the use of medicinal herbs, pastes, emulsions and cleansings, and the student was quick to surpass the master (Vanderwood, 1998). Urrea's phase as a traditional healer ended after she suffered a series of convulsions that nearly killed her. As she was convalescing she would enter deep states of trance during which she spoke with the voice of a four year-old girl. She is said to have had divine revelations and been appointed with a mission by the Virgin Mary. It was in those days that Teresa's teacher and friend Huila died without Teresa being able to do anything to heal her (*ib.*).



Huila's death gave way to Teresa's growing fame as a healer, medium, and miracle-worker; the town of Cabora became a pilgrimage site. By 1890, the ongoing flow of visitors had already changed its face. The press soon became interested in Teresa and began to research her miracles and fantastic healings as well as her past, her loves, illness, trances, and followers (*ib.*). La Santa had three major influences: religious Catholic culture, the practices and knowledge of northeastern healers and, finally, Spiritism, which were in their heyday at the end of the 19th century. In fact, Teresa attracted the interest of Spiritists who protected her and thought of her as a genuine medium. At the same time and according to Vanderwood (1998), La Santa considered priests, money, and doctors to be her greatest adversaries. The Church, particularly the town priests, had declared war on her and the Bishop threatened to excommunicate her once. Teresa lived modestly and did not charge for her services; she considered money to be a source of corruption, family dissolution, and the root cause for the poverty of the region's indigenous groups, the Yaqui and the Mayo, who saw her as their spiritual leader. Her animosity toward doctors was, in a way, a stance against her competitors, but it must also be said that doctors were few and far between and were often located in mining centers. Above all, official medicine served as a symbol for science and she saw this as being in contraposition to the Spiritist beliefs of many of her protectors and collaborators.

La Santa de Cabora was not an isolated phenomenon, but she was an exceptional one. She, in fact, coexisted with numerous saints and shamans who prophesized the end of the world while promising salvation, but her fame and influence commanded a ceaseless train of followers: the sick, the curious, and journalists. Word of mouth carried her name throughout the region, while the national and foreign press ensured her fame in Mexico and abroad. Her photographs, always elaborately presented, circulated in a variety of formats; printed stamps and scapularies with her image were sold. The press, which published pieces both in her favor and against her, also disseminated her image.

She made it to the pages of the influential newspaper *El Monitor Republicano*, as well as *el Diario del Hogar*, *La Voz de México* and *El Tiempo de la Ciudad de México* in Mexico City; *El Farral*, *El Correo* and *El Siglo xx* in Chihuahua; *El Imparcial* in Guaymas, and the monthly *La Ilustración Espírita*, published in Mexico City and Guadalajara. International coverage included the *Arizona Daily Star*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *San Francisco Call*, *The Cooper Era*, *The Clifton Arizona*, and even *The New York Times* and *The New York Journal* (Vanderwood, 2004). Oftentimes, publications such as Guadalajara's *El Diario* and *El Informador* merely reported on notes published by other newspapers, but many national and international papers sent correspondents to Cabora to conduct interviews and cover the place of events. Some of them even tried to get La Santa to cure them of some malady. Vanderwood's detailed and well-wrought research (1998) on La Santa names over 50 newspapers that wrote about her at one time or another.



Even so, it was the political complications and armed revolts in which Teresa found herself involved that assured her national and international fame. Although she did not seek or pretend to participate in politics, three local rebellions against regional authorities, the army, and Díaz's dictatorship used her name as a banner: the Mayo attacked Navojoa to the battle cry of «*Viva la Santa de Cabora!*»; the Yaqui were inspired by her in their long and silent war against the government of Porfirio Díaz and, finally, the rebels of Tomochic, Chihuahua, went to visit her and, on the way, faced and defeated a military party sent to capture them (ib.). This was the straw that broke the camel's back. The Santa and her father were arrested in Cabora, moved to Guaymas and given a choice between exile and imprisonment. They arrived in Nogales, where the journalist and Spiritist Lauro Aguirre took charge, protecting them and finding them lodging. Aguirre designed a publicity campaign with the purpose of obtaining money and improving the Santa's image. It was then that the Niña de Cabora became an elegant woman, well-dressed and impeccably coiffed. Gone were the *rebozo*, the long hair, and her tenacious followers, the indigenous poor, the regime's victims and refugees on the other side of the border (Domeq, 1992).

After settling in El Paso, La Santa began a new phase of her life. Lauro Aguirre put her in contact with a diversity of social circles, publicized her miraculous healings, and turned her into the spiritual leader of a wide political movement against the dictatorship. La Santa moved easily across border towns and even traveled to Los Angeles and New York. She became a U.S. citizen to avoid extradition and continued to successfully practice her healing and religious activities. She remained influential in Mexico, which had become increasingly violent and was quickly approaching revolution. She, however, was not able to witness this milestone and died in 1906, at the symbolically charged age of 33. Her resting place is unknown, but a journalist who has been looking for it claims to have detected or felt a special scent at Ward's Canyon Cemetery in Clifton, Arizona. Her memory remains, and the town of Clifton is preparing to incorporate her image into a new touristic project (Vanderwood, 1998).

El Niño Fidencio became famous several years after La Santa de Cabora, following the revolutionary decade (1910-1920) and during the years of religious persecution. Although he had been a medium since he was a child, it was not until around 1925 that, while working as a peon in the Espinazo hacienda, he began to heal sheep, secretly prescribe «regional herb infusions» to the ranch's families, and deliver babies. According to Laura Riley, it all began one day when El Niño, having been kicked out of the hacienda and having cried a lot, heard a voice that said: «Fidencio, don't cry: you are going to receive a gift from my Holy Father; you will be a doctor among doctors and you will cure all of the illnesses my Father has sent by using only the herbs of the countryside that you like best; you will cook them and that will be the medicine for all diseases» (Riley, 1996:6). Since then, El Niño became convinced that he healed on divine command. He



shot to fame when he cured some miners who had suffered mutilations in a mining accident (Berlanga *et al.*, 1992; Riley, 1996). In 1927 he cured the pains suffered by the hacienda owner, who promised to provide him with «publicity all over the world so they can know what you are» (ib.: 21). For this purpose, he had Fidencio's picture taken, copied, and distributed by the thousands, an event that marked the beginning of El Niño's affair with photography and the carefully prepared scenes and poses in which he was portrayed (Riley, 1996).

El Niño was also a Spiritist, possibly due to the hacienda owner's influence. Above all, however, he was a miraculous healer who possessed powers of divination. He would operate using glass fragments as instruments, pulled out molars, performed amputations, and gave massages. He used potions, pastes, «chants, prayers, and rituals» (ib.), administered herbal remedies and, in the case of nervous illnesses, he would beat or scare his patients (Berlanga *et al.*, 1999; Riley, 1996). After becoming famous, El Niño would start the day by blessing all of those present in Espinazo, offering coffee, and healing and feeding the sick. At night, after dinner, he would resume the healings and continue until 6:00 in the morning (Berlanga *et al.*, 1992). Although he had a very ambiguous relationship with women, he was always surrounded by them (Berlanga *et al.*, 1992).

It was not long before the railway station filled up with food stalls catering to the thousands of pilgrims who traveled to Espinazo in search of a cure. According to Riley, this unwelcoming place ceased to be a «forgotten plot of poor and sterile land [and] became a «Mecca of the suffering»» (1996: 11). In fact, a city had grown around El Niño's cult (ib.). Very close the station was a peppercorn tree where he had had a revelation: this became a holy site and was continually decked in votive offerings (ib.), a ritual that continues to this day (Berlanga *et al.*, 1999). In 1928, the hacienda's railway station was receiving «cars full of sick people ... who ... did not mind the tough conditions in the desert of Espinazo, where they could find Niño Fidencio» (Berlanga *et al.*, 1999). That same year, El Niño had his definitive consecration. In the midst of his severe religious conflict with the Catholic Church, president Plutarco Elías Calles came to visit him, also by train. This ensured Fidencio's fame.

According to Berlanga *et al.* (1999), El Niño administered sacraments, was known as a saint in his lifetime, and actually thought himself a saint. His fame had reached indigenous groups in the United States, who also made the trip to see him. He had an immense amount of followers in the south of Texas. For years he got the constant attention of the written press and, above all, was repeatedly photographed. He liked to be portrayed in riding outfit or with «a cross or the robes of the Virgin of Guadalupe», as well as with the patients he had healed (Riley, 1996). The press both criticized and praised him, notes on him and his photographs were incessantly reproduced in papers across the nation and, as Monsiváis puts it, «he was the idol of masses» (1992: 95).



Five years after his death in 1938, people began to annually celebrate El Niño's feast on October 17, the date of his birth; this celebration had been carried out when he was alive and is held to this day (ib.). El Niño's cult, which was always rejected by the Catholic Church has been passed down generation after generation in northeast and central Mexico and Texas (Berlanga *et al.*, 1992). Every October, according to Laura Riley (1996), Espinazo becomes a «field of suffering bodies», pilgrims in search of a cure.

DEAD MISCREANTS

It was during the life and times of La Santa de Cabora that, in the northeastern part of the border, Jesús Malverde is thought to have lived and died. His fame as a miracle worker began after his death and he only became popular decades later. His figure is reminiscent, according to Lizárraga (1998), of that of Heraclio Bernal, a Sinaloan social bandit murdered during Díaz's dictatorship. He also recalls characters like Jesús Arriaga (Chucho el Roto) and Santañón (Vanderwood, 2004), among many others. Malverde is the prototypical social bandit who, from an early age and for many years, stole from rich landowners in the Culiacán area to help the poor and the disposed. Popular tradition says that he was once wounded in one hand and police started looking for people wearing wound dressings. A few days later, men started going out into the streets wearing bandages in one hand in order to protect the outlaw and facilitate his escape.

He supposedly died in 1909, while Porfirio Díaz was still in power. The state governor forbade his cremation or burial, so his body remained in the place where he had died (Vanderwood, 2004). Faced with the rotting corpse, people began to lay down stones that quickly piled into a mound that became a site of growing devotion (ib.). Other versions claim that his corpse was left hanging from a mesquite tree because no one dared take it down and disobey the governor (Lizárraga, 1998). Finally, after some time had passed, «a muleteer who was passing through did it and buried his mortal remains, but not before asking the spirit to help him find some mules he had lost. He found his mules and it was him who started spreading the cult» (ib.). Malverde's remains, marked by a simple cross, remained buried «on the hill, close to the railway station» (ib.) for many years. Prostitutes and station laborers and loaders started bringing votive candles as well as «stones brought expressly from their place of origin» (ib.). The urbanization of the area in the 1970s led to the destruction of the tomb and this increased Malverde's fame: there were protests and some of the machines and construction workers ran into accidents. The protest caught the attention of the press and was associated to the Operation Condor, which at the time roamed the Sinaloan countryside in search of marijuana and opium (Vanderwood, 2004). The remains of Malverde's grave were moved to a parking lot and placed inside a chapel where they reportedly remain.



At the beginning, Malverde's cult was local and associated with outlaws, poor laborers, and traditional requests: cures for illness, good crops. It was the votive offerings that were peculiar: when asking for a miracle the devotee had to bring a stone to the shrine and take one of those already in there in return, keeping it as a sort of amulet until the miracle was granted. At that point, the stone was returned to the shrine along with «flowers, music, or votive candles» (ib.). With the years, Jesús Malverde became more «specialized» as the protector and miraculous patron of potential migrants, criminals, and drug dealers, all of which has increased his popularity in recent years (ib.). Malverde's cult is also strongly associated to his apparitions (those who have seen him speak of a man dressed in black and on horseback) and penchant for punishment (those who refute his intercession or make fun of his followers suffer accidents or get punished for their wrongdoings). Malverde, in fact, retrieves the punishing aspect of some traditional images and has become increasingly linked to transgression via rebellious forms of expression and symbolism: weapons, music, money. Malverde's chapel is not a site of pilgrimage, although his birthday and day of death are considered special. It is, however, visited everyday and at all hours by Sinaloenses and other Mexicans who live or have been residing in the United States and who go to him to ask for protection and help or thank him for a favor granted (ib.). Feasts in his honor are also peculiar: in addition to fireworks, «there is *tambora* music or *norteño* bands that play through the night while gallons of beer and Buchanan's whisky are consumed» (ib.).

Juan Soldado's story is quite different. He was born in 1914 –that is, in the midst of the Revolution– and arrived in Tijuana as a young soldier in a regiment. The origin of his cult is linked to a complex network of situations and social tensions on both sides of the border. In the 1930s, Tijuana became a major stopover in the route of laborers who had been deported from the United States and who, oftentimes, settled in the city. It had already been economically affected by the Prohibition in the United States and things got worse after the closing of the Agua Caliente Casino, giving way to intense unionized protests (Valenzuela, 1992; Vanderwood, 2004). During the Cristero War, the Catholic Church left only one priest in Mexicali, Baja California, and he would travel to Tijuana to hold mass once a year. It is in this context that, according to Vanderwood (2004), the Catholics in the area had to live their religiosity and do so whichever way they could. In Tijuana, a land of immigrants, there were no patron saints or interceding images one could ask for help or thank for favors (ib.).

At the same time, the press had recently reported a number of kidnappings and killings, of both children and adults, in the area of San Diego, California. The border population was worried and, as Vanderwood posits, they retained the kidnapping and murder of Charles Lindbergh's child in their collective memory (2004). And then, one day, an eight year-old girl was raped when she went out to do some shopping. She never returned home and was found dead the next



day. A number of social organizations (particularly unions) organized protests, set fire to the municipal headquarters and the Government Palace, and left a number of dead and wounded in their attempts to have the suspected killer, soldier Juan Castillo Morales, handed over to them. This worried both the local and federal authorities (Valenzuela, 1992; Vanderwood, 2004). Castillo Morales was immediately arrested, charged, tried, sentenced to death, and executed. According to Vanderwood (ib.), the whole process was carried in an unusual fashion: a martial court was immediately assembled, the sentence was read publicly (a very odd occurrence in Mexico at the time), and the execution carried out under the Ley de Fuga. Because the latter was extralegal, it would normally take place in isolated areas without witnesses (ib.). But Juan Soldado was shot in the morning so that newspaper photographers could have enough light at their disposal and anyone who wanted to witness the event could be present (Vanderwood, 2004). Vanderwood suggests these measures were taken to restore social order in Tijuana.

News of the girl's disappearance was widely disseminated on both sides of the border. Previous similar cases in California came to mind. Her horrific death, the social upheaval it caused, and the way in which Juan was executed made it to both the local and national newspapers in the United States and Mexico (ib.). Juan Soldado was buried in a graveyard where someone placed a cross with his name and the date. The girl, buried a few meters away from Juan, had been avenged; at the same time, a young soldier stationed far away from home and family had died by the infamous Ley de Fuga (ib.). The girl's tomb never attracted any offerings and her body was later moved to another cemetery (ib.). But curious people began to visit Juan's grave on the very day of his death and, soon after, a story began to circulate: the grave oozed blood and this was caused by the soldier's spirit, declaring his innocence and demanding that the real criminal be punished (ib.). The people of Tijuana had begun Juan Soldado's process of redemption (Valenzuela, 1992). It was said that he was innocent, that he had been an unfortunate scapegoat, and that it was a soldier of higher rank who was the real rapist and murderer (ib.).

Catholic tradition held that those who died suddenly and without fear were close to God, and this made Juan a good intermediary between people and the divinity (Vanderwood, 2004). The story of Jesús Malverde and the way in which his grave became a pilgrimage site was entrenched in the collective memory (ib.). Offerings soon began arriving at Juan Soldado's grave: flowers, small stones; people also began gathering in front of his tomb to pray and, not long after, came the miracles, as attested by the health-, work-, and conflict resolution-related votive offerings (ib.). The stone offerings found in the cases of both Malverde and Juan Soldado seem to be rooted in a very old Mexican funerary practice. Vanderwood sees it as «a sign of respect for a life well lived or for a sacrifice well received» (2004:63).



Juan's transformation and the beginning of his cult happened on the same year as his death. A U.S. reporter who visited the graveyard on November 1, 1938, saw people stopping by the tomb to pray; he was already seen as an innocent victim (*ib.*). His cult became increasingly associated to the unstoppable phenomenon of Mexican labor migration into the United States. The Bracero Program was instituted four years after the death of Juan Soldado, in 1942; it lasted until 1964, at which point the undocumented phase of Mexican-United States migration began (Durand, 1994). In the space of five decades, Tijuana became the major legal and illegal port of entry into the United States. Visiting Juan Soldado's tomb or carrying an amulet with his image was a way of ensuring safe transit across the border and protection while in the United States, finding a good job and being able to go back to Mexico, safe and sound, at some later date (Durand and Massey, 2001).

With the passage of time, the cult of Juan Soldado has spread to California, in the United States (the temporary or as well as final destination of many migrants), and Baja California and Sonora in Mexico, where several small chapels have been built in order to thank him for received favors (Vanderwood, 2004). His Tijuana gravesite now receives offerings from Oaxaca, Veracruz and Mexico City natives (*ib.*), a factor that reasserts his strong links to migration and, in this case, new regional migration waves.

CONCLUSIONS

The saga of border cults ended during the 1930-1940 decade with the deaths of El Niño Fidencio and Juan Soldado in 1938. The Catholic Church continues to reject any association with these figures and does not accept them as saints or figures of cult and devotion. Their transformation has, however, given rise to many theories on the construction of a new borderlands universe between Mexico and the United States and spanning from the 1850s to the 1940s. Authors like Berlanga *et al.* (1999), Domecq (1992), Lizárraga (1998), Monsiváis (1992), Valenzuela (1992), and Vanderwood (2004) have pointed out a number of shared elements. Importantly, all of these figures rose to fame and popularity during times of great social tension that gave way to social upheaval: La Santa de Cabora and Jesús Malverde experienced the worst years of the Díaz regime; el Niño Fidencio and Juan Soldado lived during the Cristero War, in times of religious persecution. Also, much has been said about the remoteness and isolation of the small border settlements, the area's ethnic and cultural diversity, and the labor-related mobility of the population. The new border, the railway, and the integration to the United States resulted in close encounters between old and new groups of immigrants who had to learn to live together, and conflict was never far away. Social heterogeneity, differences, and distance from places of origin tended to dilute believers' ties to the Catholic Church.



At the same time, the Church itself paid little attention to its border flock and the region had no patron saints or the interceding figures that could be found in the rest of Mexico. All of this turned the borderlands into a devotional melting pot that incorporated social referents such as strife, poverty, exclusion, marginalization, injustice, prejudice, discrimination, social insecurity, and the context in which the lives of old and new border settlers developed. In addition to absence, separation, deportations, labor changes, sadness, and distress, the area was rife with illness and had little to offer in the way of medical help and therapeutic treatment. It is hardly surprising that La Santa de Cabora and El Niño Fidencio initially became famous because of their healing abilities and the fact that they did not charge for their services. The empathy felt for figures such as Malverde and Juan Soldado is not surprising either, as they came to represent social bandits who avenged the victims of prejudice and injustice in the collective imagination.

The grateful beneficiaries of these miracles and healings responded by using old and proven ways of showing gratitude: the transformation of healing and votive spaces into shrines; the introduction of pilgrimages and processions, and the celebration of one or two significant days in the year that scheduled and established pilgrimage dates; the offering of stones and other abundant and significant votive offerings, and the endless retellings of miraculous healings and events followed by punishments incurred for broken promises. These tales found their way into the oral traditions of nearby and faraway ranches, where people avidly waited for any news of the world to reach them.

The worshipped characters themselves referenced a shared religious background that could be traced back to Biblical exempla and teachings: La Santa de Cabora healed with earth and saliva, would pray in solitude, and repeated phrases that recalled Christ; El Niño Fidencio healed with water, touched the sick, and would also pray in solitude. As the inheritors of a long Catholic tradition, borderlands inhabitants recognized and knew how to use these old resources to develop cults centered on themselves or others. And yet not everything was centered on tradition. Border cults integrated new elements related to the region's social complexity and diversity, as well as the historical moment. Primary among these were marginalization and transgression, and the four characters here examined were transgressive in more ways than one: in addition to being a woman in a men's world, La Santa de Cabora became, willingly or not, the leader of millenarian movements such as the Tomochic rebellion in Chihuahua; El Niño Fidencio was an effeminate character who was fully accepted by both men and women; Malverde was a legitimate social bandit, and Juan Soldado a rapist and murderer turned victim. Their followers belonged to marginalized and transgressive sectors of society who, faced with these new images and devotions rediscovered the possibility of inclusion: indigenous groups, social fighters, the poor, women, the sick, outlaws, prostitutes, migrants, criminals, drug dealers. The borderlands recreated religious practices in contemporary living and dead figures



that embodied new kinds of transitions, social phenomena, and populations in a context that could no longer convincingly benefit from the apparitionism and saintly figures that remained so frequent and useful (from the religious, ritualistic, and sacral points of view) in the rest of Mexico during the 19th century. The border's religious spatiality was occupied by characters who became distanced from their myths of origin and transformed into what Alicia Barabás (in press) calls «free texts», spaces where the tools of old religiosity mingled with emerging and urgent border phenomena that included a diversity of religious traditions as well as social tensions and movements, migration, uncertainty, tradition, and transgression.

Much has been made of the isolated nature of the border settlements, but it might be more accurate to point out that, while small, detached and scattered, these areas were not as distanced or marginalized as is often thought. The appearance and development of these borderlands devotions seems to be partially linked to processes of secularization and religious change as well as to technological development and its impact on individual and general communication. This was, furthermore, a secularization process that still necessitated significant public expression (Mallimaci, 2004).

The sanctification of living and dead individuals considered to lie not only outside the limits of the Church but to be openly against it points clearly to a syncretic attitude associated to a rejection of traditional Catholicism and its representatives; that is, these devotions sprung from sanctioned contestations in the face of Church power. The links to Spiritism are an example: La Santa de Cabora and El Niño Fidencio both used many elements of this movement, which arrived in Mexico during the mid-19th century and soon gained adherents in different parts of the country and among different social groups (Vanderwoud, 1998); they also maintained very close ties with some Spiritists. In fact, it was proximity to this movement that gave them wide national and international coverage, since its followers had well established communication networks and specialized publications. The ways in which La Santa and El Niño held court or followed certain rituals are also reminiscent of the millenarian movements that blossomed throughout the world during the late 19th century and were sometimes tied to political movements, although some might simply focus on a more naïve type of holiness (Monsiváis, 1992).

Finally, the dissemination and popularization of these four characters was intrinsically tied to three major technological developments of the era: the railway, the press, and photography. The mobility that characterized these four figures and, above all, their followers, was made possible by the new types of communication facilitated by the railway. It was by train that El Niño Fidencio and Juan Soldado arrived in the north, and that La Santa de Cabora went into exile. It was also the train that enabled all those trips and pilgrimages under-



taken by men, women, and children intent on meeting and honoring them; they when they left they spread their stories across the territory. The train linked the scattered settlements, connected people, mingled knowledge, and gave rise to new religious experiences and needs. The possibility of train travel doubtlessly helped to expand and popularize the cults of La Santa de Cabora and El Niño Fidencio. Once oral tradition began traveling on the train it no longer had to rely on the occasional traveler and professional muleteers.

This, however, might not have been enough. All of these figures enjoyed considerable press on both sides of the border and throughout Mexico. At this time, state newspapers picked up their notes from the national press and reproduced them locally, which allowed the inhabitants of distant border stations to follow the news, events and lives of individual figures. This way, everyone could follow, closely and on a daily basis, the activities and adventures of the La Santa de Cabora on both sides of the border; the unforgettable event, thanks to the press, of Calles' visit to El Niño Fidencio in the midst of the Cristero War; the protests brought about by the intended destruction of Jesús Malverde's grave; the death of the young girl in Tijuana, the riots, and the trial and execution of Juan Soldado. What is more, these news were accompanied by photographs of the events, the protagonists, and their shrines. People were able to see these figures, grow to recognize them, and form their own opinions. Juan Soldado, for example, was photographed profusely for the event of his death. But the photographs were not exclusive to the news, and posed portraits were sold in different ways and places. In fact, La Santa and El Niño became addicted to the photographic construction of their image.

It can therefore be said that the fame and popularity of La Santa de Cabora, El Niño Fidencio, Jesús Malverde, and Juan Soldado were intrinsically tied to the technological resources of the time and the ways in which their followers learned to take advantage of them. The technological advances of the 19th century became the modern accomplices of a very old resource: oral tradition. Alongside, they disseminated cult images and popularized miracles that redesigned Mexico's religious geography.

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