

# **La Cofradía de la Limpia Concepción de Los Pardos in San Joseph del Parral, 1600-1800: Reconstructing the Historical Memory of African-Mexican Community in the North of New Spain**

by

Juana Moriel-Payne  
University of Texas, El Paso, Texas

In a memoir written in 1948 and titled *El Parral de mis recuerdos (The Parral I Remember)*, Salvador Prieto Quimper describes his life in Parral; a noble provincial city.<sup>1</sup> Through his memories, the author gives glimpses of a community that was, for him, happy and harmonious; with neighbors swapping talk in the town square and beautiful, modest young ladies, but above all: men, real men, honorable men. Such was the case with Doctor Francisco Perches and Don Trinidad Villaverde, whom the author describes as “men with unmistakably Basque surnames. Each and all were like the knights of Calatrava, spotless and flawless, descendants of the most ancient Comarcan families.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, for Prieto-Quimper, those men were, “honorable, a privilege inherited from their ancestors.”<sup>3</sup>

As has been noted, in the memoirs of this 20<sup>th</sup> century author, certain values of colonial society still stand out, among them honor: a privilege which, according to him, one inherits. Although the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not his research focus, the memory of this author serves to make certain values stand out, but more than anything it serves to signal who has been erased from the memory of a mining town in northern Mexico; men and women of African origin who lived in colonial Parral as enslaved people, or spread out among castes as free men and women who in their turn knew how to defend and thus show honor, actively participating in one of the few organizations that colonial society allowed them: the brotherhoods.

Until now, Nicole von Germeten is the only historian concerned with research Black brotherhoods in New Spain.<sup>4</sup> She compares and contrasts the activities of these brotherhood groups in three locations in New Spain: Valladolid, Mexico City, and Parral. And for her, the brotherhood of this last border city didn't have the success of other brotherhoods in central Mexico for several reasons; and among them, she gives special weight to constant attacks by groups of Indians, isolation, poverty, a floating population, and excessive control by a hacienda owner in Parral and his relatives.

The presentation below expresses the belief that the analysis of La Cofradía de la Limpia Concepción de los pardos needs to be re-evaluated within an Afro-Mexican context, including the cultural influence of Spain and Africa. This kind of approach can help to demonstrate that although those African-Americans could not have counted on a consolidated and recent historical memory such as that of the indigenous groups and Spaniards in southern New Spain, however, in the north they were sufficiently free to remember and publicly show that they enjoyed a kinship that lent to an identity and local status in society, just as they did in the brotherhood in the Parral festivals. And in the same way, more broadly, it is worth adding to Afro-Mexican history, which has been disregarded in Mexican history, and consequently, does not exist in the memory of Prieto Quimper, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Parral writer.

This hypothesis is an essential part of the thesis which for the moment will limit itself to examining Germeten's study of the brotherhood of Parral together with a historiography of the African presence in Mexico. Thus, here it is germane to examine some of the primary sources used by her, some new ones taken from the Historical Archive of Parral, and thereby propose new paths for a more complete cultural study, within La Cofradía de la Limpia Concepción.

## **Historiography**

One could say that the first serious study of Mexico about the Afro-Mexican population came about in 1946, under the pen of Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. In his introduction, he points out that, surprisingly, this ethnic group assumed a "most important" role during the colonial period, "at the exact moments in which biology and culture came together to form a new nationality."<sup>5</sup> Hence, he wishes to show that the Mexican nation was built by mestizo's hands which, beyond being simply "brown," contain a great variety of skin tones. All the same, above all, Aguirre Beltrán suggests that the cultural strain that the brown-skinned, Black, mulatto or persons of color brought from Africa and Spain integrated itself into Colonial Mexico.<sup>6</sup>

More recently, Frank T. Proctor III indicates that the cultural homogeneity of most enslaved Africans who came to Mexico helped them face the complicated colonial social apparatus. These men came from Central and Western Africa, which were generally culturally homogenous areas. In New Spain, they entered into two republics, Indian and Spanish, and to fit in to the caste system, Spain used to rank indigenous, Spanish, Black people, and mestizo people.<sup>7</sup> Proctor believes groups of Africans survived culturally in this rigid colonial system because of cultural homogeneity; the same link that bound family, religion and work, spaces were Afro-Mexican identity got fashioned.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this identity did not culminate in a communal consciousness that challenged slavery, but did serve to make use of the institutions of New Spain and to exercise control over their work, family, and religious beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

Joan Cameron Bristol, in turn, proposes that African communities in Mexico could make sense of a complicated colonial society by creating alternative forms of authority.<sup>10</sup> Bristol explains that the enslaved African populous received Christianity, but understood it in their own way, as this instruction wasn't constant, since normally the enslaved African person had either monetary or productive value, rather than spiritual or religious.<sup>11</sup> The African enslaved in New Spain thus managed to participate in through the brotherhoods. These religious instances offered individual participation in acts of devotion and charity, and as a group activity, it also offered spiritual and monetary aid at the hour of death, and a way for them to participate in rituals, processions and festivals.<sup>12</sup> In any case, membership wasn't so easy to acquire, given that the authorities were suspicious of brotherhoods of African origin; because they might be sites of conspiracy and rebellion, besides the power to be used to gain access to the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition and challenge colonial power, something they used as their best weapon: blasphemy.<sup>13</sup>

African history in Mexico transforms and complicates itself, arriving at the final years of colonialism as the Spanish empire suffered setbacks, with the help of African communities. That is how Ben Vinson III presents the matter in his study of New Spain halfway through the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He shows how the formation of brown, dark, or Black soldiers and communities of color obtained benefits, and cemented a place within colonial society<sup>14</sup>. And in time, white soldiers insisted on the difference between them and Black people, eventually achieving the creation of an exclusively Black army.<sup>15</sup>

Racial segregation wasn't permanent, but this experiment in most of the important cities in Mexico served people of color as they formed communities, kinship, and began to obtain benefits, almost like any other white person. Over time, soldiers of color made inroads among elite commercial associations, could contract to marry mestizos, were exempted from taxes, had property rights for agriculture; thanks to the status conferred to them by the corporation.<sup>16</sup> Even so, the mechanism that best lent participation and privileges to brown soldiers was the political charter enjoyed by the arm in various matters. This capacity to self-govern, with their own laws and regulations, tried to separate the military from civil society, or the lower classes from decent people. Being a soldier was evidence of quality, although, that quality could be manipulated and transformed, but could never eliminate entirely the social significance of being Black.<sup>17</sup>

In general, historians emphasize the active participation of the Black community in colonial Mexico; a participation resulting from the same system that had its origins in Spain. Jane G. Landers suggests that *Las Siete Partidas*, a law ruled by the Spanish empire, allowed African persons and their descendants to have a free status. This situation let them keep an African national culture, declare a Spanish identity and thus let them be members of the church, brotherhoods, councils, the army, and thereby obtain legal protection and privileges as royal subjects.<sup>18</sup> Proctor indicates that this legal practice, brought from Spain, nevertheless became complicated or changed due to the presence of two republics: Spanish and indigenous.

Those communities added to the Afro-Mexican and culminated in a complicated caste system which, as Vinson shows, was rather ambiguous. So it is suggested that this ambiguity opened up gaps for the political, economic, and social participation of Afro-Mexicans, and also serving as a way to control the familial, economic, social circles by extending, solidifying, and transforming its cultural context.

In her study of Black brotherhoods in New Spain, von Gemeten recognizes the Spanish origins of this religious organization, the same one adopted from the Middle Ages to incorporate the non-Spanish population. At the same time, she mentions that this system was also based on an African organization in Spain since 1400 (but it is also necessary to recognize the changes, adjustments, and transformations lived by the organism in New Spain, above all the complicated system of castes, highlighted by Proctor and Landers).<sup>19</sup> Von Gemeten also mentions that the only African group trying to maintain their identity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the Zape who lived in Mexico City, suggesting that African culture could only occur and reinforce itself in the largest and most influential urban centers of New Spain.<sup>20</sup> In less important places, therefore, might it be said that Black culture didn't prevail because it got mixed with white European and brown-indigenous culture? And, is it possible to go on ignoring the importance of the cultural question in studying the Black presence in Mexico, however small it might have been?

Herman Bennett suggests that revisionist historians, among them Germeten, have focused on researching Afro-Mexican groups from the extremes, whether 17<sup>th</sup> century enslaved, or as characters in an 18<sup>th</sup> century story of social mobility.<sup>21</sup> Thus Bennet considers that under this extreme model, the people of African ascendancy appear as objects and as rarely in charge of their historical drama. And he is therefore mostly interested, not in 17<sup>th</sup> century slavery, nor 18<sup>th</sup> century social mobility, but in the story of 17<sup>th</sup> century communal Afro-American freedom.

It is in this cultural aspect that Bennett's study can support my assessments, as he suggests that since the Conquest, the status of the enslaved competed with institutional mechanisms that gave rights to the enslaved as Christian beings. Thus, to the extent Africans, Creoles, and mulattoes gained the means to make petitions like Christians as they opened doors to personal freedom, in groups or families.<sup>22</sup> Bennett however questions whether it is possible to speak of the concept of family in relation to African experience as he asks what was the character of the enslaved African family structure, and how did the generations that followed after the abolition of slavery vary? It is precisely this proposition by Bennett that deserves my attention: studying the African presence through the alternative social composition of the family, looking at family ties or kinship related to a society governed by Christian religion and acted out in a space more suitable to show its new history and identity via religious festivals.

This posits that the primary sources used by von Germeten need to be placed in the political, social, economic, and cultural context of 18<sup>th</sup> century Parral, to leave behind the extremes and prejudices through which the Afro-Mexican brotherhood and others in New Spain have been viewed.<sup>23</sup> In the same way, it is important to consider the co-existence of several cultures, among them the European (Spanish-Mediterranean), indigenous and African to determine the cultural complexity of this place. Cheryl Martin English mentions that Chihuahua's colonial elite, made up of mainly Spaniards and other Europeans who transferred much of their cultural baggage to the low classes, among whom the importance of ritual in socio-politico-cultural life stands out.<sup>24</sup> Taking this into consideration, the information herein is from secondary sources focused mainly on two themes or areas: colonial festivals and Afro-Mexican society, with the goal that the analysis of the brotherhood puts into perspective the interrelation between religion, politics, society, and culture.

## Historical Context

It's known that in the richest and most productive regions of America, the conquering Europeans supplemented indigenous labor with imported and forced African labor. In New Spain this wealth was concentrated in sugar plantation, industry, and gold and silver from a few mining centers outside Mexico City. Nonetheless, while exploration of the north advanced, mine veins gradually appeared that produced not only silver, but political, social, and cultural systems. In these northern systems the African population was also present, and its participation extends and enriches knowledge of colonial Mexico.

Doubtless the most relevant historical work on mining in northern Mexico comes from Robert C. West.<sup>25</sup> A pioneer of the of this theme and region, West works to show that a king's miner in Parral developed in a manner different from mines in central Mexico and the rest of Latin America. And for him the singularity can be found in distance, climate and a variety of vegetation, besides a scant indigenous population that made up of scattered groups who did not respond favorably to the introduction of dividing mines in colonial times.

According to West, the most significant settlement in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the royal silver mines in northern Mexico. The most important was discovered in 1546, in Zacatecas, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> century they appeared in adjacent locations, in the district of Parral.<sup>26</sup> This district was located in a mixed geographical zone that permitted the development of mining. The Sierra Madre provided grazing for animals, areas with trees offering wood and coal, and they enjoyed culverts to water farms. Besides, there existed stretches of desert where saltwater deposits could be found, from which they obtained salt for mineral reduction. Likewise two big rivers surrounded the district of Parral; Conchos and Florido, which yielded water to the agricultural zones neighboring Parral (San Bartolomé and Ciénega).<sup>27</sup>

With all these resources dedicated to mining, by the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Parral became the largest producer of silver in northern Mexico.<sup>28</sup> This success was short-lived; by the end of 1600 mining riches were tapped out. Still, in 1630 two reserves of silver were discovered in Santa Barbara, La Negrita, and La Prieta, causing miners and workers from New Galicia and Mexico City to arrive in droves. Only then did the royalty of San Jose de Parral get established, with a mayor and mining officials, and by 1632, the populace grew at the same rate as the refineries, warehouses, and supply stores.<sup>29</sup> In this historical context one may analyze Parral colonial society; the birth of a mining town that inherited a populace comprised principally of Spaniards, Black people, the indigenous enslaved, and workers forced into labor, which later became a cadre of voluntary workers or the enslaved taken in combat.<sup>30</sup>

West points out that in the mining zone of northern Mexico, labor sharing was less significant than in the South, probably due to the location of royalties in dry districts, not fit for farming, or because of nomadic and semi-nomadic people dwelling there did not comprise a reserve of skilled workers, since normally they would rebel when forced to work. Thus, due to the fact that mines required skilled workers, free workers from the mines of southern Mexico (Mexquisenses, Tarascos, mestizos and mulatos), or from Sonora and Sinaloa arrived.<sup>31</sup>

In this mixed society governed by caste systems, the mining elite, devoted to Catholic religion, tried to control the past, present, and future of the mining town. At least that is how von Germeten presents it, who claims that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, economic, political, and social control of the villages was the province of the Montaña de la Cueva family and their descendants. This control showed in work and community. That is where they taught each his or her place in the society of a town with high indices of poverty, sickness, drought, and hunger, but they did not cease to confer their religious rituals like any other important village in New Spain.<sup>32</sup>

## **La Cofradía de la Limpia Concepción de Los Pardos**

If anything characterized society in New Spain it was the interest in maintain, mobilizing and demonstrating hierarchies. Hence, the public demonstration of social hierarchy was carried out in social space permitting the co-existence of diverse segments of society involving religion and its rituals. And although society used religion for practical ends, there also existed spiritual interests closely related to community membership, and thus acceptance in a community was independent of where one fell on the social scale, and synonymous with civic sense and above all, honor. Ordinarily, the belief has been that only elites were worried about honor, but recent historiography suggests that was not the case.<sup>33</sup> As von Germeten shows in her study, the brotherhoods are an example of how some marginal groups were just as preoccupied with showing the elite that they could count on their civic sense and honor.

The members of the brotherhood, among them Black and mulattos, managed to count on these virtues praised, not because of a past based on heritage or lineage, but rather the idea of kinship, and in its turn, redefining a community under reconstruction in a way that showed it in festivals and religious rituals in Parral in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In a study of the brotherhoods in New Spain, von Germeten pays special attention to the participation of Afro-Mexican groups. She indicates that the brotherhoods made up of persons of African origin were almost always devoted to the religious figure of Pure Conception of the *pardos*. This fraternity, unlike others existing in other parts of New Spain, was not only made up of persons of African descent, but also mestizos and indigenous people. Besides, von Germeten adds that unlike other fraternities in Mexico, this was a hacienda fraternity, where silver was refined, and in this way, subsidy and support were guaranteed for the brotherhood, but they set limits on their autonomy.<sup>34</sup>

Von Germeten points out that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century Parral society did not easily accept the participation and the past of the brotherhood.<sup>35</sup> Elites in particular, embodied in the Montaña de la Cueva family, stood against this brotherhood, particularly against Black people, mulattos and *pardos*. Some members of that powerful family used the enslaved status of those members as a weapon against them in legal battles.<sup>36</sup> Hence, besides that enslaved status, this family could have also used their skin color, since not all of those descendants of Africans were enslaved—some were free people.

Thus, von Germeten presents a drama between the “evil” and “good” ones, which makes opaque Afro-Mexican experience in northern New Spain and indicates that in 1677 New Spain had strengthened its position in Parral society upon receiving the Pope’s official recognition to carry out its festivals in the chapel of the hacienda owner, Don Felipe Montaña de la Cueva. Proud that their petition had been heard, the members of the brotherhood, among them the mulatto sergeant Antonio Narvaez, attached the papal reply on the church door.<sup>37</sup> It seems that this did not go over well with the pure bloods, among them Antonio de Urrecha, a Spaniard from Durango, opposed in his stand by the mayor of that time, Antonio de Narvaez.

Von Germeten points out that servant status, in this case Urrecha’s, was superior to that of hacienda workers, and the enslaved. Nonetheless, Narvaez was neither a servant nor a laborer for Don Felipe; rather he’d been a soldier and it seemed that his military career had gained him respect in society.<sup>38</sup> Taking this into account, von Germeten suggest that the legal case among these men was the cause of Urrecha’s jealousy of Narvaez’s success. Still, I consider that more important than placing in relief Urrecha’s supposed jealousy, it is better to emphasize that the members of the brotherhood were workers on the hacienda, and some of them might have been part of the Army. As we will see later, this complaint has racial connotations, but at the same time, it shows what von Germeten leaves out—that mulattos in northern New Mexico could gain status by participation, and as Vinson mentions, therefore they had legal recourses available to them as any free person.

She also analyzes a document dated December 8, 1676 in which a disagreement between Urrechea and Narvaez reaches a climax. On that day, a procession of the brotherhood was held in which the image of the Virgin was smashed on the floor. Thus, Antonio de Narvaez submitted a petition to the authorities to offer evidence, but also to command the testimony of Urrechea causing the document to have two versions. The document of Narvaez shows that the brotherhood members offered honors to the Virgin as they did each year and that the image of the Virgin was the property of Don Phelipe Montaña de la Cueva. They carried it with solemnity when the servant of Don Phelipe, Antonio de Urrecha, while stepping out of the procession, “threw the image, causing a scandal in the village, because of the damage he could have done to the Queen.”<sup>39</sup>

Urrecha, on the other hand, claimed that the mulattos carried the image of the virgin in a precarious fashion. He testified that the wind was strong and that he had advised the mulatto Narvaez and other Black people not to carry the image of the virgin in the procession, as she must be treated with reverence “in the hands of a priest.” So for him, the mulattos had acted in an indecent manner. Urrecha at no moment clarifies whether he threw the image or not, but he affirmed that the members of the brotherhood were not “clean” enough to be carrying an image of the virgin. Besides, Urrecha questioned the right of the fraternity to appear in court, especially with Narvaez as leader, since “this mulatto is an imprudent, incapable and crude person.” It appears that Narvaez dropped the suit when Urrecha demanded that he give testimony, because he felt that he couldn’t speak for all members of the brotherhood.<sup>40</sup>

In this suit von Germenten brings to light that Urrecha took advantage of his privileged status to placate Narvaez, but she does not emphasize the latter’s capacity to demand the testimony of Urrecha. Besides, von Germeten does not make clear that the testimony of brotherhood members carries and its implicit discourse that recognizes the authority of its patron, Don Phelipe, which also praises Catholicism and the queen of Spain. With this discourse, *pardo* members of the brotherhood could have tried to show that they, contrary to the Spanish Urrecha, were more decent and more Catholic, but they also knew how to maintain their place in the social scale of colonial Parral.

Nevertheless, it didn’t end there for Narvaez; in 1677 he was in a suit with another Spaniard, Cristobal Villamayor to determine who was responsible for the chapel of the Immaculate Conception and for the religious objects kept there.<sup>41</sup> Narvaez was accused of buying stolen objects, but during the suit, several members of the community testified in his favor, making plain “his good name, as a man of good faith and reputation, well known in the town.” Here, von Germeten suggests that this good reputation and good name were based on his image as a family man, his public activities, his leadership in the fraternity, and more than anything, his title of sergeant. And most important, the witnesses for Narvaez also mentioned that “he was received in the governor’s palace and in private homes for festivals and celebrations,” and that he also gave “silver objects and jewels to the church.” With these recommendations, Narvaez was declared innocent.



Von Germeten points out that the rank of sergeant was probably the strongest piece of evidence for Narvaez, all the time. Hence, I assert that if in fact that rank counted in his favor before the government's representatives, what could be more important and interesting is how the mulatto and sergeant Narvaez was viewed by his community? This detail could show that during colonial times, identity and a person's worth fell to the community, and more so for a mulatto immersed in the caste system. Treated in these terms, Narvaez could be an example of how certain mulatto groups founded brotherhoods in order to demonstrate their capacity to be good men, with good reputations founded on Spanish rules, but at the same time, allowing them to recreate an atmosphere of kinship which counted as a way to participate actively in their communities. In any case, the rank of sergeant may be analyzed from another optic; from that of the borderland. That is, did this title have more prestige in a community created in part to protect the borders of the Spanish empire? Thus, the question of the African historical presence deserves more research.

In *Recreating Africa*, the central question explored by James Sweet indicates that in Latin America, the enslaved African community recreated African culture, managing to preserve an independent "African" thought, yet simultaneously practiced alongside Catholicism. Yet the level of recreation depended on the historical time and place of arrival, thus provoking a slow and unequal cultural resistance and religious conversion in Latin America.<sup>42</sup> Hence, Sweet also suggest that in order not to be erased and to affirm a place in the world, Africans created new alliances and forms of kinship, adopting alongside Western and Christian customs.<sup>43</sup>

In the borderland, as where von Germeten locates her study, Sweet's proposal about the historical time and place becomes necessary in a study about the Afro-Mexican presence in Parral. This approach may serve to consider that since the forced exit from Africa, until the arrival in northern Mexico, there is a gap of several years during which events occurred at the imperial, regional and local levels affecting inhabitants on several levels wherein the number of Africans, indigenous people and Spaniards on the border mattered. Historians in general suggest that the participation of Afro-Mexicans in colonial society was "successful" due to alliances and kinship systems, and it seems that mulattos and *pardos* in Parral did this with indigenous people and mestizos, by way of a long and slow process.

In her essay, Pat Carroll speaks about an African enslaved culture that led people to seek refuge among affine cultural communities, indigenous ones, and among them to recreate kinship.<sup>44</sup> However, this cultural relationship wasn't easy, because Spaniards opposed relations among indigenous people and Black people, and in short, they considered these alliances a threat. So, according to Carroll, masters or owners of the African enslaved destroyed African identities based on ethnicity by racially marginalizing Black people within the emerging caste system, in which the African person adapted based on physical appearance or more precisely on skin color. In this way, upon observing that this system operated in a plural society, Black people realized this was an advantage, as they could negotiate certain privileges and construct their own society, community or identity by performing and playing between European and indigenous systems.<sup>45</sup>

If Carroll had concentrated her study on central Mexico, her research and conclusions could be applied to the context of northern New Spain because La Cofradía de la Inmaculada Concepción de los *pardos* was comprised of Black people, mestizos and indigenous people. Hence, the color *pardo* refers precisely to unions between Black people, the mulatto and indigenous people which resulted in the mix between Europeans and Africans, and the mestizo union between whites and indigenous people, although this designations also took into account “African” physical traits or cultural customs.<sup>46</sup> Here, the most evident was skin color and this in general determined race and social position in the caste system, but with so much variety of colors, it could have been possible for many people to get lost in a *pardo* system that reached its prime expression and political-social value in festivals.

It is precisely that value that Linda Curcio-Nagy analyzes in the colonial festivals of Mexico City. Specifically, she’s interested in knowing how certain colonial concepts got represented and received by spectators. Hence, she points out that colonial spectacles were crucial for Spanish authority, as they were molded, presented and taught how to act out social and political concepts. In short, festivals served Spanish authorities as a medium of control and domination, while citizens (among them indigenous people and Black people) represented their identity as vassals. In this manner, society participated in the creation of an idealized colonial society, where each person knew his or her place in the social hierarchy.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, Curcio-Nagy also mentions that the festivals, by their nature, occurred outside normal space and time where participants and spectators became more receptive to social, cultural and religious concepts.<sup>48</sup> In this ideal space the language of ritual had a special power, and at the same time, it told of the multifaceted interpretations that lent themselves to the participation of individuals in social-political discussions obtained by exploiting forms of ritual through the representation of actors, such as satirical sermons or poems. Last, Curcio-Nagy insists that those rituals were cultural constructions that simultaneously sought to ignore and hide socio-economic tensions.<sup>49</sup>

## **The Municipal Historical Archive of Parral**

The Municipal Historical Archive of Parral (AHMP) contains extensive documentation that needs to be reviewed in detail. However, a quick glance raises a series of questions that may widen the story of the Black community of northern Mexico. For example, there exists a complaint against Don Antonio de Urrecha for having attacked a man with a knife.<sup>50</sup> Von Germeten uses this document to show that Lázaro de Reyes, a free mulatto who, just like Narvaez, was also a leader in the brotherhood, and served as witness to the crime. Here, von Germeten might have given more attention to the active political-social participation of members of the brotherhood, such as the de los Reyes. Second, this document may also serve to show that Don Antonio de Urrecha was a more complex person than presented by von Germeten, because he had suits not only with mulattos, and his work as a servant of Don Phelipe was not influential enough for him to escape justice.

In the same context, von Germeten also uses another document as evidence that Antonio Narvaez, contrary to the members of the Montaña de la Cueva family, ended up with his reputation damaged.<sup>51</sup> Yet, she does not mention that in this complaint over money, the signature of Antonio Narvaez appears, and later in his deposition, the mulatto defends himself by claiming to be a “poor man.”<sup>52</sup> Thus it may be deduced from these facts that the mulatto Narvaez was not so unfortunate before colonial law; he knew how to write, and he could count on the opportunity to defined himself and to employ a “negative” idea in his favor. Also, there are other documents like these to help form the concept of a more complex Parral society. For example, von Germeten mentions that a mulatto, Juan de Dios Ybargas, was denounced for shouting “bad words” at a Spanish woman.<sup>53</sup> Yet she does not mention that this woman, besides being Spanish and married; and the file doesn’t define the words as “bad” but rather as “strong,” and von Germeten does not indicate that this man received 23 lashes as punishment.<sup>54</sup> I think it is important to put all this in historical context, and in this case, investigate why those words were judged as “strong.” Did this have to do with the reputation of the married woman? Was it different from the reputation of a non-Spanish woman? As can be seen, this lone document helps one to realize that in researching the brotherhood, it also deserves analysis in the context of gender.

In the same way, La Cofradía de la Inmaculada Concepción de los *pardos* of the small, poor, distant village of Parral had much more to offer if it is analyzed from the participation of the brotherhood in religious rituals and festivals.<sup>55</sup> Several historians have already emphasized the importance of local religion, and some have addressed it within northern Mexico, including the different functions of the brotherhoods.<sup>56</sup> Yes others have focused on Latin America to show that an analysis of festivals of Spanish origin performed during colonial times may demonstrate how different means by which different social groups created ties and wielded power.<sup>57</sup> A quick glance at the colonial archive of Parral reveals that these festivals enjoyed a healthy Mediterranean cultural content, by including figures of Moors and Christians, as well as bullfights of Spanish origin and their representation via theater and comedy.<sup>58</sup> Curcio-Nagy makes a provocative comment for historians of northern Mexico by mentioning that festivals take place in created spaces, not real ones, ripe for having an impact and hiding the defects of the societies.

This work hopes to continue in the future with the goal of deepening the cultural-theatrical masquerade allowing a link not only to large colonial cities, but also small communities, poor in resources but rich in minerals and culture. This theatrical-carnival-performance aspect may teach us even more about the reconstruction of African kinship going beyond the black and white of Afro-Mexican history; it carries all the way to the Mediterranean and has the potential to show that colonial Mexico was not entirely dominated by Spanish noblemen, a truth that could not have pleased Prieto Quimper, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Parral writer.

Second, it is noteworthy that von Germeten suggests that Afro-Mexican brotherhoods in colonial Mexico in relationship to the level of social participation had more “success” in large urban centers owing to a greater concentration of persons of African origin which echoed a greater peace and a higher economic level that ultimately assured greater participation. Hence, in Parral that participation didn’t happen because conditions were the opposite, yet the sole case of Narvaez is proof that the Cofradía de la Inmaculada Concepción deserves a wider and deeper analysis. This essay gives a more complicated picture of Afro-Mexican historiography, insofar as it is situated in a more inclusive local context that takes into account the relation between the Black community and its role within a mestizo caste society wherein the place of social hierarchy could contribute to the well-being of Afro-Mexican people.

And finally, in light of new evaluations, it is necessary to question what von Germeten means in her description of Indians, in what kind of isolation and poverty did Parral exist, the role of a floating populace, and the control of a hacienda owner in a multicultural border town where perhaps the recreation of African culture no longer had meaning, as it was staking a claim on the new border culture of its time with Afro-Mexicans in control of their historical drama?

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Salvador Prieto Quimper, *El Parral de mis recuerdos: datos para la biografía de una noble ciudad de provincia* (México D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1948).

<sup>2</sup> Prieto Quimper, *El Parral de mis recuerdos*, 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>4</sup> Nicole von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press at Florida, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México 1518-1810* (México D.F.: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946).

<sup>6</sup> Aguirre Beltrán presenta un panorama amplio de moros o moriscos prisioneros, o negros esclavos de Portugal y España que vinieron a América, no directamente de sus lugares de origen, sino de estadías prolongadas en barracones inmundos, 156-182.

<sup>7</sup> Frank T. Proctor III, *“Damned Notions of Liberty”* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 40, 47. The term “Race” was linked to lineage, in terms of de “limpieza de sangre”, idea that has its origin in Spain, where Spaniards, Jews and Muslims shared the same territory.

<sup>8</sup> Proctor III, *“Damned Notions of Liberty”*, 94, 124.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 116.

---

<sup>14</sup> Ben Vinson III, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). This kind of participation existed since 1550, when the military forces developed autonomously during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, due to the decision of Borbonic Reforms decided to expand the militia body.

<sup>15</sup> Vinson, *Bearing Arms for His Majesty*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>18</sup> Jane G. Landers, "Introduction", in Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson, Eds., *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 2-5.

<sup>19</sup> Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Bennett, *Colonial Blackness*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> This research adds that the index of the Municipal Archive of Parral used by von Germeten has been eliminated. Since 2006 there is another index, the Catálogo Fondo Colonial. This research was able to locate Orly some of the documents used by von Germeten in the new intex, and at the same time uses others not previously studied. This research will expand in the future to a doctoral dissertation and that is why it considers necessary to invest more time to undersatand the changes in the indexes.

<sup>24</sup> Cheryl English Martin, *Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century* (Sanford: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1996), 186.

<sup>25</sup> Robert C. West, *La comunidad minera en el norte de la Nueva España: el distrito minero de Parral*, translated by Ricardo Cabrera Figueroa (Chihuahua: Talleres Gráficos 2003).

---

<sup>26</sup> Mines in areas of Fresnillo, Santa Bárbara and Cusihiuriachic. Santa Eulalia will be discovered until Eighteenth Century, in 1704.

<sup>27</sup> West, *La comunidad minera en el norte de la Nueva España*, 24-34.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-37.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. The forced repartimiento of native workers was made by an organization of feudal origin (reconquest) called encomienda. (96).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99

<sup>32</sup> Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 159-160.

<sup>33</sup> Cheryl E. Martin, *Governance in Colonial Chihuahua*; Jesus de la Teja y Ross Frank, *Choice, Persuasion, and Coercion*; William E. French, *A Peaceful and Working People*; Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood*.

<sup>34</sup> Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 166.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>39</sup> In the notes 170-177, von Germeten indicates that all those conflicts of 1670 are in the Parrochial Archive of Parral APP, box 4, leg.2, sf. Unfortunately, the access to this archived has been suspended, 253.

<sup>40</sup> Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 174.

<sup>41</sup> “Contra Antonio de Narváez, Parral 1672”, AMHP, 1672<sup>a</sup>, Criminal, exp. G 33, sf. (Nota 27 en libro de Germeten, página 252). Este documento no se ha podido ubicar en la nueva guía.

---

<sup>42</sup> James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-3, 6, 191.

<sup>43</sup> Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 33-34.

<sup>44</sup> Pat Carroll, “Black Aliens and Black Natives in New Spain’s Indigenous Communities”, in Ben Visnson *Black Mexico: Race in Society from Colonial to Modern Times* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 73-74.

<sup>45</sup> Carroll, “Black Aliens and Black Natives, 84-85.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>47</sup> Linda Curcio-Nagy, *The Great Festivals of Colonial Mexico City : Performing Power and Identity*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 2-7.

<sup>48</sup> Curcio-Nagy, *The Great Festivals*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>50</sup> AHMP. D50.003.039 ( En su libro, von Germeten cites this document in the notes, pg 252).

<sup>51</sup> Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 167. (Note 25).

<sup>52</sup> AHMP. D12.024.4872

<sup>53</sup> Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers*, 167. (Note 26).

<sup>54</sup> AHMP. D16.001.002

<sup>55</sup> The Municipal Archive of Parral also has many documents about other brotherhoods that co-existed with the Cofradía de pardos, retail that is important to be analizad in order to extend the research and understand the context of the religious and cultural life of Parral; AHMP.FC.B12.001.005, Cofradía del Santísimo Sacramento; AHMP.FC.D12.011.267, Cofradía de Nuestra Señora del Rosario; AHMP.FC.D12.016.357, Cofradía de Nuestra Señora de la Ánimas Benditas; AHMP.FC.D12.016.369, Cofradía del Santísimo Sacramento del real; AHMP.FC.D47.006.060, Cofradía de la Sangre de Cristo.



---

<sup>56</sup> Martin Austin Nesvig, ed, *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico), 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Carolyn Dean, *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cuzco, Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> AHMP.FC.A16.004.106. This archive is big and it is about the festivities celebrated by the pardos. At first look it shows the tensions in the power relationships between the law officials and the Brothers. But at the same time one can see the complexities in the legal arrangements, where in one of the documents, “the pardos, lovers of parties, and miserables, were permitted to include bullfights to celebrate their virgin because the celebrations were also a good occasion to attract workers for the mines. (AHMP.FC.A07.001.003).

## Primary Sources

Archivo Histórico del Municipio de Parral

AHMP. D50.003.039

AHMP. D12.024.4872

AHMP. D16.001.002

AHMP. FC. A16.004.106

AHMP.FC.A07.001.003

AHMP.FC.B12.001.005

AHMP.FC.D12.011.267

AHMP.FC.D12.016.357

AHMP.FC.D12.016.369

AHMP.FC.D47.006.060

---

## Secondary Sources

- Aguirre Beltrán, Gonzalo. *La población Negra de México, 1519-1810*. Ciudad de México: Ediciones Fuente Cultural, 1946.
- Bennett, Herman L. *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Cameron Bristol, Joan. *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).
- Carroll, Pat. "Black Aliens and Black Natives in New Spain's Indigenous Communities", in Ben Visnson, *Black Mexico: Race in Society from Colonial to Modern Times*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009.
- Curcio, Linda Ann. *The Great Festivals of Colonial Mexico City: Performing Power and Identity*. Albuquerque : University of New Mexico Press, 2004.
- Dean, Carolyn. *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cuzco, Peru*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Landers, Jane G. "Introduction", en Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson, Eds., *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.
- Martin, Cheryl English. *Governance and Society in Colonial Mexico: Chihuahua in the Eighteenth Century*. Sanford: Stanford Univeristy Press, 1996.
- Nesvig, Martin Austin. Ed, *Local Religion in Colonial Mexico*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2006.
- Prieto Quimper, Salvador. *El Parral de mis recuerdos: datos para la biografía de una noble ciudad de provincia*. México D.F.: Editorial Jus, 1948.

---

Proctor III, Frank T. "*Damned Notions of Liberty*". Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010.

Sweet, James H. *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441 -1770*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Vinson, Ben, Matthew Restall. *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Bearing Arms for His Majesty: The Free-Colored Militia in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Von Germeten, Nicole. *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006.

West, Robert C. *La comunidad minera en el norte de la Nueva España: el distrito minero de Parral*. Translated by Ricardo Cabrera Figueroa. Chihuahua: Talleres Gráficos del Gobierno del Estado, 2003.