

Between Marginalization and Integration: Colonial *Castas* in the Zacatecas Area at the Beginning of the 18th Century

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Abstract. – The large amount of civil and criminal suits that occurred during the 18th century in Zacatecas helps us to apprehend the *castas* in their daily lives and to discover and understand the way they were integrated, or not, in this particular, remote mining region. This task is made easier by the utilization of methodological tools such as social networks, which give us a different point of view: that of the individual. A criminal event dating from January 1709 is the occasion to literally meet many *castas* in various social positions and to further our understanding of these elusive populations who constantly swayed between complete marginalization and real integration.

From the last decades of the 16th century onwards, silver mines grew and prospered on the central plateau of New Spain, which resulted in the founding of major towns such as Guanajuato, Zacatecas, and San Luis Potosí. The prosperity of the mining industry attracted many people in spite of the location of these towns in the middle of vast, almost deserted areas. Indeed, contrary to the Peruvian mining industry, these areas were deprived of sedentary, populated Indian settlements, forbidding in the process the installation of forced-labor like in the Potosí region. Instead, another labor system appeared, based on paid workers, free to go from a mining town to another in search of the richest place or the greatest opportunities. Thus, the miners rushed to the *reales de minas* which, thanks to their own growth, stimulated other complementary activities (construction, crafts, and cattle farming). As a consequence, a new society was created: a society where the local characteristics (mining economy, deserted areas) added themselves to the urban ones (the lower class made of poor Spaniards who tended to adopt the *castas'* attitudes, *castas* and *ladinos*, Spanish-speaking Indians).

We can find most of these characteristics during a criminal event that occurred near Zacatecas in January 1709 and that involved *castas* among the highwaymen as well as among the victims and the people who arrested the thieves and murderers. Indeed, we learn about Spanish landowner Marcos Pérez's murder by a heteroclite group of vagrant *castas* and Spaniards. After a denunciation, they were arrested on the same day by the *comisario del campo* Hernando Briceño Sr., a *mestizo*, and the people he had gathered. Those events made it to the colonial documentation because three of the thieves escaped from their prison a month later and sought refuge in a convent before being arrested again by the *corregidor* of Zacatecas, Felipe de Otaduy y Avendaño. The local clergy believed then that the *corregidor* had violated the ecclesiastic immunity when he had forced the convent doors open, which was the beginning of a three-year-long legal dispute.¹

However, we are more interested in the events of January because of the different ties and relationships that exist between the protagonists (family ties, mere acquaintance, and clienteles) and what they reveal about the *castas'* social position.

THE EVENTS OF JANUARY 3RD AND 4TH, 1709

Before progressing further into the analysis, we need to make a presentation of the context, the protagonists, and the events of these two days. This preliminary work will make it possible to establish a link between what happened then and the general situation of the *zacatecana* society at the beginning of the 18th century, and we will be able to go beyond the simple case file and to reflect on the integration of the *castas* in Zacatecas as well as on the influence of the specific local characteristics on their social position.

First, from an economic point of view, the first years of the period can be considered as a real turning point as far as the *zacatecana* mining industry is concerned. Indeed, the first decade marks at the same time the end of one of the greatest periods of prosperity in Zacatecas, the lowest production levels being reached between 1700 and 1705,

¹ Archivo General de Indias (hereinafter AGI), Audiencia de Guadalajara, 158: La violación de la inmunidad eclesiástica en Zacatecas.

and the beginning of a brief moment of bonanza until the 1730s.² In fact, the context of the events of 1709 is a moment when the local industry is confronted to acute difficulties and succeeds temporarily in overcoming them. Solange Alberro has demonstrated that these periods characterized by a changing conjuncture deeply affected a population tightly bound to the rhythms of the mining industry.³ Furthermore, the population of Zacatecas grew rather spectacularly during the first decades of the 18th century: We can count 15,000 inhabitants in 1682 and 40,000 in 1732.⁴ This growth can be explained by the added presence of miners, Spaniards, *castas* or Indians, who were attracted by the local bonanza in the 1680s and then, several years later, in the 1710s. As a result, the *zacatecana* society seemed to be somewhat weakened by the rapid variations of the conjuncture and the demographic growth it underwent at that time.

The numerous trials that occurred at the beginning of the 18th century can be perceived as an expression of this relative instability. For instance, in 1704, Felipe de Otaduy y Avendaño, *corregidor* of Zacatecas, investigated the issue of fiscal fraud concerning the payment of the *diezmo real*, a tax of ten percents that the miners had to pay to the Crown in New Spain.⁵ It is interesting to note that the *corregidor* began his investigation when the silver production reached its lowest level in three decades: maybe the fiscal fraud can be considered as a symptom of the stagnation of the local mines at that time. Furthermore, several law suits about the payment of the *alcabala* began in the 1710s. The most important trial happened in 1716 when the entire community (miners, merchants, and commoners) sued Pedro de Aristoarena y Lanz. This man's behavior and abuses concerning the perception of the tax was perceived as a real threat to the town's economy (thus the miners' and merchants' involvement) and supply (thus the

² Peter Bakewell, *Mining and Society in Colonial Mexico. Zacatecas, 1546–1700* (Cambridge 1971), p. 259; Frédérique Langue, *Mines, terres et société à Zacatecas (Mexique) de la fin du XVIIe siècle à l'indépendance* (Paris 1992), p. 58.

³ Solange Alberro, "Zacatecas, zona frontera, según los documentos inquisitoriales, siglos XVI y XVII": *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* VIII (1985), p. 139–174.

⁴ Peter Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain* (Princeton 1979), p. 200.

⁵ AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, 150: Expedientes y pesquisas en Guadalajara (1688–1719), "Papeles que pasaron de gobierno tocante al pleito que litija don Felipe de Otaduy y Avendaño, corregidor de la ciudad de Nuestra Señora de las Zacatecas [...]", 196f.

commoners' presence).⁶ Zacatecas is located in an isolated, deserted area, where the agricultural resources are limited. As a consequence, the issue of supply of the town is a crucial one, which explains this mobilization of the community against a man who seemed to threaten its well-being. In the end, the events of January 3rd and 4th happened in a context of underlying crisis, which can explain the presence of impoverished vagrants and brigands near the town as well as the following events, such as the long law suit opposing the *corregidor* to the local ecclesiastic authorities.

As far as the *castas* are concerned, the very end of the 17th century reveals that the Crown was fully intent on enforcing their restrictions on this population, particularly regarding their right to possess and carry weapons. Since the beginnings of the colony, the legislation had manifested the Spaniard elite's defiance about the *castas*: irremediably "tainted" by their illegitimate or slave origins, these people were perceived as untrustworthy and even potentially dangerous. As a consequence, their rights to carry weapons had been restricted since the 16th century, as illustrated by an article in the *Recopilación de las leyes de los Reinos de las Indias* which denied this right to mulattos and *zambos*, and restricted it for the *mestizos* (the latter could carry weapons if they were not vagrants).⁷ However, in 1692, and later in 1696, two *reales cédulas* addressed to the president of the Audience of Guadalajara insisted on these interdictions quite heavily. The first one reminded the president his duty to enforce the "orders and laws that forbid the Indians, *mestizos*, Black people, and mulattos to carry weapons".⁸ Four years later, the second document reproached the president his laxness on this particular issue and the authorizations he gave to some mulattos in spite of the royal regulations.⁹

⁶ AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, 194A: Pleitos Audiencia de México, 1716: Los diputados, comercio, común y minería de la ciudad de Nuestra Señora de Zacatecas, su jurisdicción y Veta Grande, con Pedro de Aristoarena y Lanz, vecino de México, sobre el tanteo o encabezamiento de las alcabalas de dicha ciudad y jurisdicción. Pendiente en 1726. 2 piezas.

⁷ "Libro VII, título V, ley XIV": *Recopilación de las Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias*, 3 tomos (ed. facs. Madrid 1943, 1a ed. Madrid 1791).

⁸ AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, 232: libro 7, f. 138, "Real Cedula al presidente de la Audiencia de Guadalajara sobre que observe los órdenes y leyes que prohíben traer armas los Indios, mestizos, negros y mulatos".

⁹ AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, 232: libro 7, f. 258v, "Real Cedula al presidente de la Audiencia de Guadalajara extrañándole las licencias que en contravención de leyes dada para que algunos mulatos tragan armas".

Not only was the legislation not enforced as it should – as the reminding of the first *real cédula* shows us, which is a common phenomenon in colonial America –, but a local administration such as the Audience of Guadalajara had also decided to give authorizations from time to time. Were those authorizations some kind of legal recognition of a fact – *castas* able to carry weapons – impossible to correct and control? This first hypothesis would manifest the authorities' incapacity to maintain the *castas* in their defined place in the colonial society. Or, maybe those permissions were an answer to a strategic demand, to the need of defending the populations against Indian raids that occurred at that time. This second hypothesis would put an emphasis on the greater capacity of the local administration to adapt the legislation to the particular context and demands of New Galicia. Unfortunately, the documents are too few to further explain the president's attitude. However, this particular point is quite interesting, since about ten years later *castas* still carried weapons in the area of Zacatecas. Of course, the thieves carried weapons, which shows that authorities could not enforce the law, and the men lead by Hernando Briceño as well, which is an argument in favor of the second theory: that of the adaptation of the law to local conditions.

Now, let us describe more precisely the events we are interested in. Everything began when well-known thieves attacked a group of travelers on January 3rd, 1709, near Zacatecas. The attack ended with the Spanish landowner Marcos Pérez's unfortunate death.¹⁰ About ten men constituted this group of thieves, and among these men was an impoverished Spaniard, Joseph de Olague, and some *castas*: a young *castizo* named Agustín de Almiralla and a *coyote* from Zacatecas, Juan de Reina. According to the suspects' depositions, the group had left San Luis Potosí eight days earlier in order to travel to the area of Zacatecas.¹¹ Maybe those men were attracted by the relative and temporary bonanza of the local mines. Whatever their motives were, they attacked Marcos Pérez and his companions near Fresnillo on January

¹⁰ AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, 158: La violación de la inmunidad eclesiástica en Zacatecas, "Causa criminal que se ha seguido contra Joseph de Olague, Juan de Reyna y Agustín de Almiralla por salteadores famosos ajusticiados en la ciudad de Zacatecas en que se hallan también los autos formados sobre la competencia de [?] suscitada por el excelentísimo señor arzobispo, obispo de este obispado, y los formados por el juez eclesiástico que se retuvieron", f. 25 r.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, f. 28v.

3rd, 1709. Nonetheless, it appears that those thieves were not unknown in the region: one man recognized them and was able to name some of them. His name was Bartolomé Briceño and he had survived the attack. The day after, he went and sought his brother Hernando, a *mestizo* who possessed the official charge of *comisario del campo* and acted like a local sheriff. Hernando, informed by the Spaniard Nicolás Álvarez that three of the thieves had found refuge in the *puesto* of Susaya, decided to gather about fifteen people to proceed and arrest the fugitives as his function allowed him. Among these men we can find “Pascual de la Cruz, Joseph Briceño, Juan Pérez, Hernando Briceño el Mozo, Luis de Ayala, Juan de Santiago and some others whose names he [Bartolomé Briceño] ignores”.¹²

Most of them claimed, in their statements, to be *vecinos* of Zacatecas, and one can notice the importance of the Briceño family among this heterogeneous group: not only was there Hernando Briceño, but his brother Bartolomé was also present as well as his son Hernando “el Mozo” and his cousin Joseph Briceño, *vecino* of Zacatecas. Since Hernando Sr. claimed to be a *mestizo*, one can think that it was the same for most of the family: Bartolomé must have been a *mestizo* as well and Hernando Jr. may have been a *castizo* (it is difficult to be positive since we do not know the origin of his mother). Among the other men, we can find Spaniards – the victim’s son Bartolomé Pérez de Rivera who joined the small troop –, an Indian – Juan de Santiago, Bartolomé Briceño’s servant who was called by Hernando Sr. –, a free mulatto – Luis de Ayala, *vecino* of Zacatecas and owner of a *rancho* located near Panuco –, and, finally, a *coyote* – Pascual de la Cruz, about whom we do not have much information. Then, the group lead by Hernando Briceño rode to Susaya – where Agustín de Almiralla, Joseph de Olague, and Juan de Reina had sought refuge – and, assisted by Nicolás Álvarez, arrested them without encountering much resistance. Finally, the thieves were taken to the prison of Zacatecas, from where they would escape a month later.¹³

¹² Ibidem, f. 25v. “Pascual de la Cruz, Joseph Briceño, Juan Pérez, Hernando Briceño el Mozo, Luis de Ayala, Juan de Santiago y otros que no sabe sus nombres”.

¹³ AGI, Audiencia de Guadalajara, 158: La violación de la inmunidad eclesiástica en Zacatecas, “Testimonio de los autos que se formaron sobre la extracción que el señor Felipe de Otaduy y Avendaño corregidor de la ciudad de Zacatecas hizo de los reos que se habían refugiado a la Iglesia del señor San Agustín de dicha ciudad y muerte de garrote que se ejecutó en las personas de Agustín de Almiralla y Joseph de Olague y Juan de Reina por salteadores famosos y homicidas y de todo lo demás ...”, f. 43r.

In a few words, our case is one of robbing gone bad in which numerous *castas* were present and active. We can find them among the thieves as well as among the group gathered by the *comisario del campo*, or, in other words, among marginalized people as well as among rather integrated people. However, what stirred our attention up is not the narrative of this case but what the involvement of *castas* at different levels can reveal about their social position in the area of Zacatecas at the beginning of the 18th century.

THE DIFFICULTIES RAISED BY THE STUDY OF THE CASTAS

If we go beyond the mere narrative of the events, this case allows us to analyze closely a part of the colonial society ordinarily quite silent in the sources. We evoked earlier those men who participated in the events and whom society commonly named *castas*. This term had been used to refer to the individuals born from the various unions which had been occurring since the 16th century in colonial America between Spaniards, Indians, and Africans. From a legal point of view, and from the colonial elites' one, the protagonists of the events are part of the *castas*, that is the first characteristic that defines them and conditions their place in society. This initial definition of miscegenation, a legal and biological one, which is consequence of the colonial representations, is at the origin of the first studies about the phenomenon.¹⁴ This part of historiography based its study on the analysis of the colonial legislation and other sources coming from the elites, such as the correspondence, and presented this question as something clearly delimited and defined by prejudices, as the society dreamt by the Spaniards was supposed to be. The consequence of such an approach is the transformation of the *castas* into passive objects of the colonial law and vision, of an authentic objective of segregation. From that point of view, the *castas*' integration in the colonial society can be perceived as difficult or even nonexistent if we stop our analysis at the numerous prohibitions and rejections related to them.

¹⁴ Angel Rosenblat, *La población indígena y el mestizaje*, tomo 2: *Las castas coloniales y el mestizaje* (Buenos Aires 1954), p. 188; Magnus Mörner, *Le métissage dans l'histoire de l'Amérique Latine* (Paris 1971); idem, *Estado, razas y cambio social en la Hispanoamérica colonial* (México, D.F. 1974).

However, if the documents characterize Hernando Briceño as a *mestizo* or Luis de Ayala as a mulatto, did these men actually perceive themselves as such? This question has been raised since the beginning of the 1980s and has led to a new way of considering the phenomenon: the biological notion of miscegenation and the legal categories created from it are not considered as relevant anymore, and, instead, the notions of acculturation, identity, and self-perception have been favored.¹⁵ If we analyze our group of *castas*, we cannot deny that the various individuals did call themselves *mestizo*, mulatto, or *coyote*. Apparently, they used the colonial nomenclature to describe themselves. Nonetheless, do these declarations correspond to their self-perception? Furthermore, does the historian have to consider them the way they describe themselves in impersonal sources that reflect the elites' preoccupations and obsessions more than anything else?¹⁶ As a result of those considerations, historians have been putting the notion of miscegenation into perspective, more and more favoring the question of acculturation.¹⁷ And, at the same time, the concept of acculturation has become relevant to, and has been applied in, more and more fields of study (history of art, of techniques, etc.),¹⁸ which led Serge Gruzinski to write that it was now almost impossible to study the phenomenon of miscegenation because historians had "forgotten" the initial concept and, most important, the main object of its study, that is to say mixed-blooded people, the *castas*.¹⁹

Indeed, the concept has become an almost shapeless idea and, at the same time, the interest for the *castas* has dissolved into vaster topics that are only partially related to them, such as social stratification in colonial America. Thus, from that perspective, the protagonists' characterization is not that important since the sources are too few to allow a thorough study of the question of identity: in a few words, it is difficult

¹⁵ Chantal Caillavet/Martin Minchom, "Le métis imaginaire. Idéaux classificateurs et stratégies socio-raciales en Amérique Latine (XVII^e–XXI^e siècle)": *L'Homme* 122–124 (1984), pp. 115–132.

¹⁶ Jacques Poloni-Simard, "Redes y mestizaje": Guillaume Boccara/Sylvia Galindo (ed.), *Lógicas mestizas* (Temuco 1999), pp. 113–138, here: p. 118 and 126.

¹⁷ Solange Alberro, *Les Espagnols dans le Mexique Colonial. Histoire d'une acculturation* (Paris 1992).

¹⁸ Enrique Florescano/Virginia García Acosta (coords.), *Mestizajes tecnológicos y cambios culturales en México* (México, D.F. 2004); Juan Comas/Enrique González/Alfredo López Austin/Germán Somolinos/Carlos Viesca (eds.), *El mestizaje cultural y la medicina novohispana del siglo XVI* (Valencia 1995).

¹⁹ Serge Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse* (Paris 1999).

to analyze this kind of documentation using the concepts elaborated during this renewal of historiography in the 1980s and 1990s. On the contrary, it is possible to deal with the problematic of social stratification, thanks to references to the professions and possessions of each man. Some groups can be identified (thieves, craft workers, owners of *ranchos*) and illustrate how the socio-economic dimension is important in the structuring of the *zacatecana* society, which contradicts the fantasy of the “society of *castas*” described by the first studies about mixed-blooded people and fed by the colonial prejudice. In the end, the result of such a work is somewhat static and does not represent the great complexity of the colonial society, which is quite unsatisfying.

However, Jacques Poloni-Simard’s works demonstrated that it was still possible to apprehend the multiple nuances of the colonial world and, at the same time, to study the *castas* very closely. This approach based upon an analysis of social networks and the study of legal sources or notarial documents radically changes the perspective: *castas* are not objects anymore but actors, subjects that interact with the rest of the colonial society.²⁰ It is that kind of approach that finally helps us to understand the dynamics of the group of men who appeared through the events of January 1709 thanks to the analysis of the ties that bound them, of the nature (family or simple acquaintance) and orientation (to the Spanish world, to the marginalized world, within each of these groups) of such ties. In a nutshell, we do think that, in order to fully appreciate the position of the *castas* in the area of Zacatecas at the beginning of the 18th century, one of the ways is the truest possible reconstruction of the colonial reality using the personal networks that appear in the documents, a reconstruction that we will confront later to the representations born out of colonial prejudice (topic of the *mala vida*) or out of the stereotypes present in historiography (image of the poor *peón*). Such work reveals a variable discrepancy between reality and representations: sometimes there are points of convergence and sometimes both dimensions diverge considerably, which reveals the great complexity of the colonial society. In the end, we can observe heterogeneous, mobile populations that go back and forth between integration and marginalization, and thus form a true mosaic.

²⁰ Jacques Poloni-Simard, *Indianité et métissages: la dynamique de la société indienne du corregimiento de Cuenca (Equateur), XVI^e–XVIII^e (Paris 1995)*; idem, “Redes y mestizaje” (note 16), p. 113–138.

A question that has been underlying the studies about *castas* since the first studies by Ángel Rosenblat or Magnus Mörner is indeed the problem of their integration in the colonial society. Spanish elites, and the Indian world as well, had been rejecting those “ambiguous” populations since the 16th century, which had been a real obstacle to their process of integration. Furthermore, the social studies in the 1970s insisted on their subordinate position and their slow but constant drop in status. However, those approaches adopt a rather strict definition of the notion of integration, legal or socio-economic, which often leads to the global image of *castas* rejected from the colonial society in one way or another. Still, if we consider the individual or the small group instead, what is the signification of “being integrated”? First, we can consider that it is a somewhat “double-faced” concept elaborated with the idea of belonging to and participation in a social group (having a profession, a defined function) and the idea of acceptance by this same group (society recognizes and accepts the individual’s contribution): the conjunction of both of these ideas is at the origin of the process of integration. Such a definition leads to a nuanced conception of the matter and makes us establish several spheres of integration (economic, social, cultural, and political) whose reunion characterize the quality of the individual’s overall integration. For instance, a same person can be integrated from an economic perspective thanks to his personal achievements but still be rejected by the Spanish elites who do not appreciate a new rival. Likewise, one family can have some members fully contributing to the colonial society and other ones rejecting its codes. Thus, the study of the *castas* not only forces us to go back and forth between marginalization and integration but also to define and precise the different degrees of the latter.

To accomplish such a task, legal sources are real treasures. Penal and civil suits and enquiries by the Inquisition usually mention the accused, the plaintiff and the witnesses’ racial and social statuses. As a consequence, these documents can be the first step of a prosopographic analysis thanks to the individuals thus identified. Mobilized in a sufficient number, these sources provide much information about social behaviors as well. We can indeed study the frequency with which the *castas* appear as the accused, as the victim or as the plaintiff; we can also have an idea of the crimes committed, the sentences, etc. Lastly, when a sufficiently coherent group appears in the documents, it becomes interesting to analyze the ties that bind these people using the

tools of social network studies. This double aspect of legal sources is what Jacques Poloni-Simard calls the anthropological and social dimension of these documents,²¹ and this is what we plan to achieve in the analysis that follows. This way, we will try to appreciate the complexity of the society in the area of Zacatecas at the beginning of the 18th century, a society in which the *castas* go back and forth between marginalization and integration, and are divided into people able to change their condition and get closer to the Spaniards, and others, the vast majority, unable to find their place in the colonial society.

A MARGINALIZED GROUP OF MEN

The thieves and their behavior are easier to study and analyze since their situation does not diverge much from the classical image, and even from the stereotype of the marginalized *castas* that has dominated the colonial representations and historiography for a long time. Indeed, by the examples of Juan de Reina, Agustín de Almiralla, or Joseph de Olague, we can see that these stereotypes can be of socio-economic nature and of socio-racial nature as well. However, Joseph de Olague's trajectory, a young Spaniard who became a thief, illustrates not only that marginalization was not reduced to the type of the "frustrated *mestizo*" but also that a Spaniard can become a *casta* from an economic and cultural point of view and keep his legal status at the same time, morphing into a most ambiguous figure.

Almiralla and Reina's presence among the thieves is an example of the numerous *castas* who were victims of the colonial segregation and often felt rejected from society being driven into more or less complete marginalization. That is why we find them essentially among the masses of vagrants, daily workers, and *peones* employed in *haciendas* or mines. Most of the time, they did not have any perspective of upward social mobility or any real ties, which made it easy for Spanish mines or land owners to use them to work in their properties.²² According to Enrique Florescano, the *castas*' demographic expansion during the colonial period contributed to the introduction of a new

²¹ Ibidem, p. 126.

²² Enrique Florescano, "La formación de los trabajadores en la época colonial, 1521–1750": Enrique Florescano et al., *La clase obrera en la historia de México. De la colonia al imperio* (México, D.F. 1980), p. 100–101.

working organization, the *peonaje*, a system which has led to the constitution of social groups without any “own means of production”, which made the mines and *haciendas* function thanks to their daily work, and which were constituted of individuals that the author calls *mestizos*, “ethnically, culturally and economically speaking”.²³

In that perspective, the *castas* were prominent among the laborious “classes” but also among the numerous vagrants who roamed the roads of New Spain. In the eyes of the colonial society, such populations were the perfect example of the “type of the frustrated *mestizo* whose resentment would be expressed sometimes by escaping, sometimes by aggression”.²⁴ As they were neither Spaniard nor Indian nor African, the *castas* had a hard time finding their place in a society that did not want them socially speaking and that could not offer a place to most of them economically speaking.

Finally, if we take the particular case of Zacatecas into account, the local society was doubly singular because of the combined influences of the mining world and the frontier. Indeed, it is an area that attracted many adventurers and miners seeking a prospering mining town in which they could improve their lives or even make a fortune. Furthermore, these regions were hardly inhabited (about 258,000 inhabitants in the whole area of New Galicia in 1750)²⁵ and were far away from the main political center, Mexico, which offered more impunity to such vagrant populations.²⁶ More precisely, in the North of New Spain, the free, paid miners, the *operarios de minas*, were a particularly mobile population which travelled from one mining town to another developing one, as described by Frédérique Langue for the region of Zacatecas.²⁷

Now, our thieves had left San Luis Potosí, an important mining town in Nuevo León, in order to go to Zacatecas, a town where, between 1705 and 1710, the first signs of a new period of prosperity could be observed. As a consequence, we may suppose that the vagrants had travelled between the various *reales de minas* in the area, searching for the richest ones, as the *operarios de minas* used to do. Apparently, the appeal of Zacatecas was real for the vagrants of the

²³ Ibidem, p. 103.

²⁴ Mörner, *Le métissage dans l'histoire de l'Amérique latine* (note 14), p. 92.

²⁵ Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain* (note 4), p. 39.

²⁶ Alberro, “Zacatecas, zona frontera” (note 3), p. 139–174.

²⁷ Langue, *Mines, terres et société* (note 2), p. 41–42.

area and thus for some marginalized members of the *castas*. Almiralla and Reina exemplify this category of *castas*, which is one of the most common images in historiography: people who are rejected economically, socially, and legally speaking. Cultural rejection, based on several stereotypes can be added to these concrete forms of rejection.

The thieves Agustín de Almiralla and Juan de Reina and their situation are the perfect example of the social, legal, and economic obstacles that some *castas* had to overcome to find their place in colonial society. Moreover, their trajectory and their behavior is an illustration of the parallel the Spaniards' tended to draw between miscegenation, illegitimacy, and *mala vida*. Indeed, ever since the *mestizos* had appeared in the 16th century, the elites had been describing some kind of vicious circle that established a causal link between illegitimate or slavish origins and inherent flaws such as sloth or violence. In a nutshell, the *castas* were purported to be the perfect representation of vice. The 18th century is the time when those prejudices became the strongest. One example is the more and more restrictive matrimonial regulation that forbade "socially uneven" marriages in order to prevent the *castas* from tarnishing the Spaniards' reputation.²⁸ Such stereotypes somehow constituted a strong founding principle of colonial society and presented the *castas* as a real danger. From this perspective, the thieves actions' tended to confirm and reinforce these images in the colonial imaginary. More generally, the stereotypes picture the *castas* as an urban mob that would become dangerous as soon as there was a shortage of work. Magnus Mörner quotes Luis de Velasco's words in 1593: "Society suffers from being invaded by lost and roving people who do not work because they cannot find any occupation. These vagrants bully and insult the Indian people as well as the Spaniards".²⁹ The same topic and analogy between idleness and dangerousness can be found in the correspondence of the mining elites: the *operarios*, often *castas* in northern New Spain, were an important element of the colonial economy when they did work but, on the contrary, forced unemployment due to reasons of conjuncture morphed them into idle vagrants and dangers for society.

This is what the *Tribunal de Minería* in Mexico expressed when they wrote to the *virrey* after a severe crisis that had struck Guanajuato

²⁸ Mörner, *Le métissage dans l'histoire de l'Amérique latine* (note 14), p. 71–73.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

back in 1780. According to them, the town and its industry “[were] threatened by the idleness of the great number of *operarios* who [participated] in the activity of extraction and who [were] going to become necessarily as many thieves”.³⁰ So the stereotypes concerning the *castas* were the combination of the prejudice against the urban lower-class in general – idleness, dangerousness – and the mixed-blooded people’s supposedly inherent flaws – sloth, dishonesty, debauchery, and violence. This combination gave birth to a fantasized vision of a group perceived as homogenous in its dangerousness, which justified its rejection by the colonial society. Then, *castas* went on being characterized using the specter of illegitimacy as descriptive conceit, and events like the January 1709 murder under study contributed to reinforce the fantasy: one cannot deny the arrested thieves’ violence and murderous tendencies. That kind of events justified the colonial society’s effort to exclude those people. As a consequence, this rejection contributed to increase the number of “bitter *mestizos*”, which created a real vicious circle of stereotype where discourse, fantasy, and real facts nurtured one another.

The group of thieves did not only incorporate *castas* but also at least one Spaniard, named Joseph de Olague. This mere fact is a contradiction to the common opposition between the *castas*’ inherent dishonesty and the Spaniards’ honor. Contrary to his companions, Olague has been mentioned another time, three years before the facts,³¹ which allows us to appreciate and understand his social trajectory a little more. We find him in 1706 as a plaintiff in a case of cheating during a game of dice that occurred at doña Josepha de Arroyo’s place. He and another Spaniard, Juan Ruíz, accused a *lobo* nicknamed *El Mexicano* of having used rigged dice. Among the other witnesses present that day, there were a slave and a young mulatto whose first name was Esteban. A few pieces of information can be gathered from this case. First of all, it seems that Olague, who was 19 years old at the time, was entirely part of the urban plebs and shared some of their habits and distractions along with *castas*, freemen, and slaves. Of course, he

³⁰ AGI, Audiencia de México, 2240, Expedientes de minería, Carta del 7 de octubre de 1780 del Tribunal de Minería al virrey, f. 2r: “También nos amenazaba ya la absoluta falta de platas y la ociosidad del gran número de operarios que mantiene la minería y que necesariamente se irían convirtiendo en otros tantos ladrones inevitables”.

³¹ Archivo Histórico del Estado de Zacatecas (hereinafter AHEZ), Poder judicial, Criminal, Caja 3, Expediente 17.

was a Spaniard, but his social status was much closer to the popular circles than the elites. However, he was a plaintiff, just like Juan Ruíz, accusing a *lobo*, a *casta*, of robbing him. This use of justice seemed to indicate some acceptance of common social rules by these two men. Olague and Ruíz thought they had been wronged: instead of seeking self-justice, a common thing at the time, they chose to appeal to the authorities. Moreover, we can see two Spaniards, clearly named, who knew each other, accusing a *lobo* whose nickname was the only thing they knew about him. Indeed, *El Mexicano* was described like the perfect example of the stereotypical, roving and thieving *casta*, and maybe the complaint was partially motivated by this image. We have to admit that, even if some Spaniards tended to gravitate around *castas* and occasionally shared their daily routine, a solid frontier remained and separated both groups in spite of a socio-economical connection: a poor Spaniard would always think his status was greater than a *casta*'s. Thus, we can consider the complaint as the expression of the feeling of superiority or the will to reinforce that feeling by relating *El Mexicano* to the role of a cheating man and a thief. In a nutshell, of course Olague had taken part in a game of dices along with *castas*, but his behavior indicated a desire to situate himself on the "good side" of society.

However, three years later, in 1709, we find him back on the "wrong side". He was a plaintiff in 1706, he had become a thief and a murderer by 1709. He did not call the authorities to defend his interests anymore and, on the contrary, he was chased after by them. That young man appears to have suffered a severe drop in status, socially, economically, and legally speaking, which shows us how fragile the frontier is between weak integration, that is to say being part of the urban plebs, and marginalization. Is this drop in status the result of the economic conjuncture? Is it the result of a voluntary trajectory? It is difficult to give a clear answer because of the very few pieces of information we gathered. Nonetheless, one thing is sure: Joseph de Olague, even if he stayed a "Spaniard" as far as the colonial law was concerned, had become a "*mestizo*" as far as the *zacatecana* society was concerned, just like his companions. He is a man whose behavior served as a justification for the stereotypes and stigma attached to the *castas*. In fact, his trajectory is an illustration of the complexity of that society, which is reinforced by Hernando Briceño's opposite trajectory.

TOWARDS INTEGRATION?

The Briceño brothers' situation is somewhat different from the traditional depiction of the marginalized *castas*. They seemed to be integrated to the local society and, in Hernando's case, they even had a position of relative importance. Using the methodological tools from network studies appears to be a pertinent approach in order to better understand this particular situation. Thanks to this, we have been able to recreate Hernando and Bartolomé's personal networks and analyze their respective positions in the local society.

First of all, it is necessary to study the way the selected individuals acted and interacted in the colonial society. Which kind of relationships did they have? What kinds of persons did they interact with (Spaniards, Indians, *castas*, integrated or marginalized people...)? These are the questions that lead our reflections and make the use of tools from social network studies necessary. In that perspective, various approaches are possible. The first one consists in analyzing solidarity ties, a method that researchers notably used to apprehend the elites' world and which reveals two types of relationships: a first one presenting horizontal ties between families from equal background, and a second one showing vertical ties defining models of clientele.³² For the purpose of studying *castas*, both vertical and horizontal relationships can be analyzed to distinguish their level of integration. In fact, we can try to find a mulatto's clients, debtor, and creditor or discover in which circles this mulatto moved. Another way to accomplish that task is by locating the *castas*' position in a clientele and evaluating their role, their action, and the advantages they could acquire within this social structure. Such an approach not only will allow us to measure the level of integration but it also can help us to observe strategies used to achieve upward social mobility – if we can follow this evolution on more than one generation, of course. However, considering that the subject of our research is a group quite invisible in the documents, this method is not the most appropriate, at least if we want to follow it strictly. It is difficult to develop a long term study when

³² Michel Bertrand, “Les réseaux de sociabilité en Nouvelle-Espagne: fondements d'un modèle familial dans le Mexique colonial (XVI^{ème}–XVIII^{ème} siècles)”: *Pouvoir et déviances en Méso-Amérique*, XVI^{ème}–XVIII^{ème} (Toulouse 1998), p. 98.

the identified individuals only appear once or twice in the sources, as the protagonists of the events of January 1709 do.

As a consequence, in order to analyze small samples and reach satisfying results, it is necessary to adapt those methodological tools. A way out is, for instance, concentrating on personal networks at a given time thanks to the different ties that appear in the documents,³³ then examining their nature – family, clientele, simple acquaintance, etc. – and the social categories with which the individual tended to interact. If the sample is sufficient, it is possible to recreate more personal networks and to compare and combine them, and we may be able to form a “complex network”.³⁴ In fact, even if it is somewhat impossible to achieve a real network study, it is possible to use part of this method in order to develop new reflections thanks to the analysis of a small sample. This is what we are trying to do with the reconstruction and examination of Hernando Briceño’s personal network.

Indeed, if one can consider Agustín de Almiralla and Juan de Reina as perfect examples of the *castas* rejected to the margins, with the same right some of the men Hernando Briceño gathered to arrest the thieves can be seen as illustrations of the possibilities the *zacatecana* area offered to the *castas* as far as integration is concerned. The various statements show us that, in the beginnings of the 18th century, some *castas* could be perfectly integrated into the colonial society, socially and economically speaking, a fact that somewhat contradicts the traditional perception of these people. We can see that Luis de Ayala, a free mulatto, owned a *rancho* near Real de Panuco.³⁵ In the documents from the 18th century, the term *rancho* is often used as a synonym of *hacienda* and describes indifferently cattle farms and ovine farms. When the precision is needed, it is given by way of an added adjective: *rancho de ganado mayor* or *rancho de ovejas*. Even if there are not any precisions about the nature of Ayala’s *rancho*, the simple fact he owned one contradicts Enrique Florescano’s description of *castas* as people only having their hands as resources.³⁶ Thus, Luis de Ayala is part of those free mulattos who had been able to reach a rather comfortable socio-economic status and had escaped from their traditional position among poor artisans and daily workers.

³³ Alain Degenne/Michel Forsé, *Les réseaux sociaux* (Paris 2004), p. 27.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

³⁵ “Causa criminal” (note 10), f. 40v.

³⁶ Florescano, “La formación de los trabajadores” (note. 22), p. 103.

Moreover, Hernando Briceño's official function obviously entailed the right to possess and use weapons.

That fact totally contradicted the colonial law that had forbidden the use of weapons to *castas* since the 16th century because of their supposedly inherent "viciousness". This function also gave Hernando a real local authority. Thanks to his position, he was able to gather men from all origins to go and arrest the thieves. He was the one who led the first interviews and the search of the thieves' lair.³⁷ Furthermore, one can think that this group of men gathered by Hernando Briceño and made of Spaniards, mulattos, and *mestizos* had access to weapons in order to achieve their goal. Maybe the fact of being summoned by a local law enforcer allowed *castas* to momentarily overstep their limited status and rights? Or else, maybe this situation is simply the illustration of the gap between the letter of the colonial law and the practical reality of the Zacatecas area whose characteristics made adaptations of the law necessary for the purpose of maintaining some order. Whatever the explanation is, Hernando Briceño and Luis de Ayala can be perceived as examples of this process of social integration a few *castas* were able to accomplish during the 18th century since both men seem to have reached a respectable status in the *zacatecana* society.

Finally, we would like to analyze Hernando Briceño's case more precisely. The way he had been able to gather the 14 men to chase after the thieves shows the relevance of the methods from personal network studies to reach a better understanding of these social mechanisms. We already said that the Briceño family's relationships are multiple and very different. First of all, the *mestizo* Bartolomé Briceño was traveling along with Marcos Pérez on January 3rd, 1709, when the group was attacked. This presence among the Spaniard's companions can be explained by the fact that both men were part of the same socio-economic circles (Bartolomé also owned a *ranchito*).³⁸ Moreover, Bartolomé appeared to have known some of the thieves by sight: he declared having recognized the *coyote* Juan de Reina from Zacatecas, the Spaniard Joseph de Olague, and Agustín Lango.³⁹ A few hypotheses come to mind to explain this fact. It is possible that Bartolomé Briceño had recognized them as well known thieves. Maybe he had

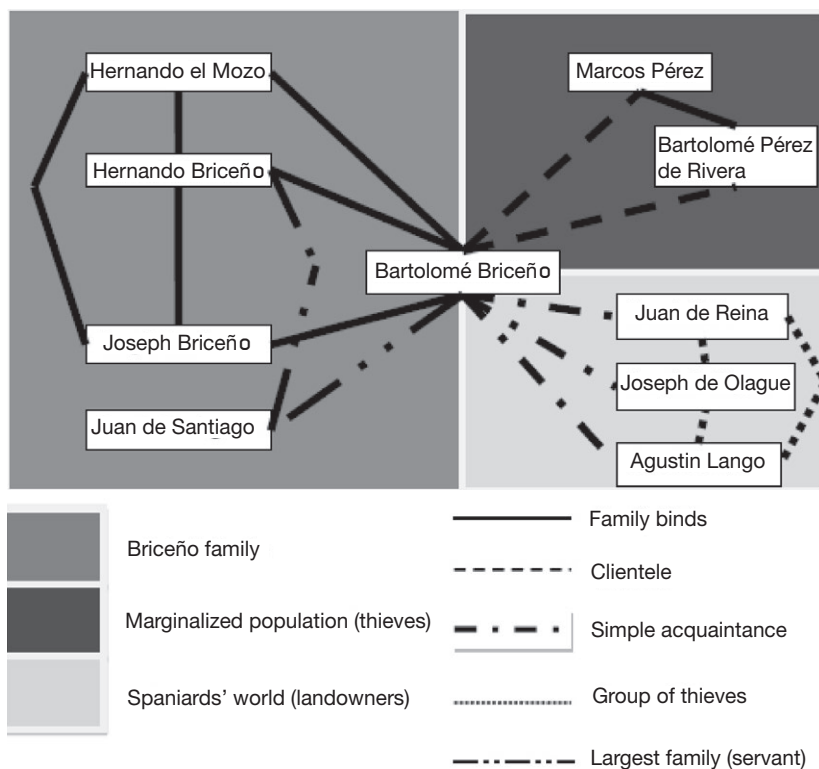
³⁷ "Causa criminal" (note 10); "Testimonio" (note 13), f. 32.

³⁸ "Causa criminal" (note 10), f. 44 r.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 25r.

met them when they still were daily workers, artisans, or owners of small properties: a crisis could have morphed them into vagrants and thieves as Joseph de Olague’s case seems to indicate. In fact, Bartolomé seems to have been socially located between the Spanish world of landowners and the *castas*’ and poor Spaniards’ one.

FIGURE 1: BARTOLOMÉ BRICEÑO’S PERSONAL NETWORK



Now, his brother Hernando’s situation is even more interesting. The *comisario del campo* was able to gather a real clientele in order to arrest the thieves. First of all, he called people among his own family circle: his brother Bartolomé and one of his servants, the Indian Juan de Santiago,⁴⁰ his son Hernando *El Mozo* and his cousin Joseph,

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

vecino of Zacatecas. Moreover, as the little group was riding to Susaya, Hernando called other men: the mulatto Luis de Ayala, the *coyote* Pascual de la Cruz and some others, whose names Bartolomé ignored.⁴¹ Of course, the presence of part of his family is easily understandable and can be explained by the importance of family ties, by blood and by name.⁴² The easiest case to analyze is Juan de Santiago's. He was Bartolomé's servant and, as such, belonged to what we could call the "extended family". Considering his position, his presence is most natural. His particular case allows us to observe a perfect example of an "*amestizado* Indian" who spoke Spanish and lived in Spanish society. Juan de Santiago is called "Indian" in the documents but his integration to the Spanish world made him a true cultural *mestizo*. From this point of view, one can say he was part of the *castas*. One last interesting detail is that Juan de Santiago was not called by his master but by this master's brother,⁴³ which could be perceived as the illustration of a familial hierarchy: thanks to his official function, Hernando seems to have been able to gather not only his family but also their own servants. This may indicate he was truly the family leader. As far as the other men are concerned, one can think that this function gave Hernando the status and relative prestige of a local worthy: as such, he could easily gather men to help him accomplish his task. In a nutshell, his social position placed him as the leader of a network he was able to occasionally mobilize.

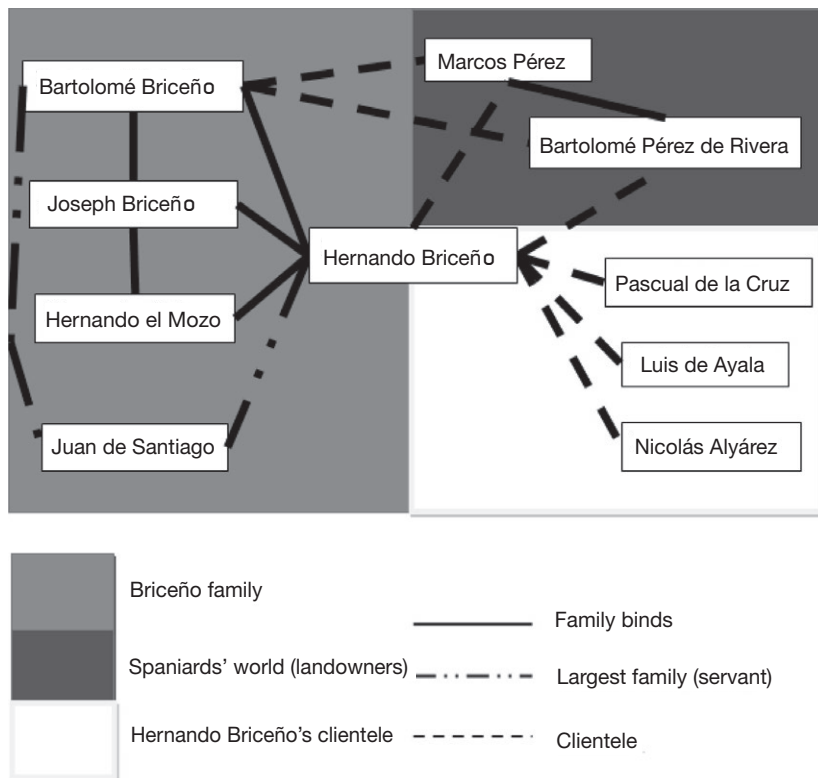
This situation reveals how well the Briceño family seems to have been integrated to the *zacatecana* society. It is true especially as far as Hernando is concerned: the man really acted like a local *cacique*. Finally, this family had an intermediary position between the Spanish world represented by the victim, Marcos Pérez, and the circles of the *castas* like Luis de Ayala or Pascual de la Cruz. A few other details found in the archives from Zacatecas confirm these hypotheses.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, f. 25v.

⁴² Bertrand, "Les réseaux de sociabilité en Nouvelle-Espagne" (note 32), p. 98.

⁴³ "Causa criminal" (note 10), f. 25r.

FIGURE 2: HERNANDO BRICEÑO'S PERSONAL NETWORK

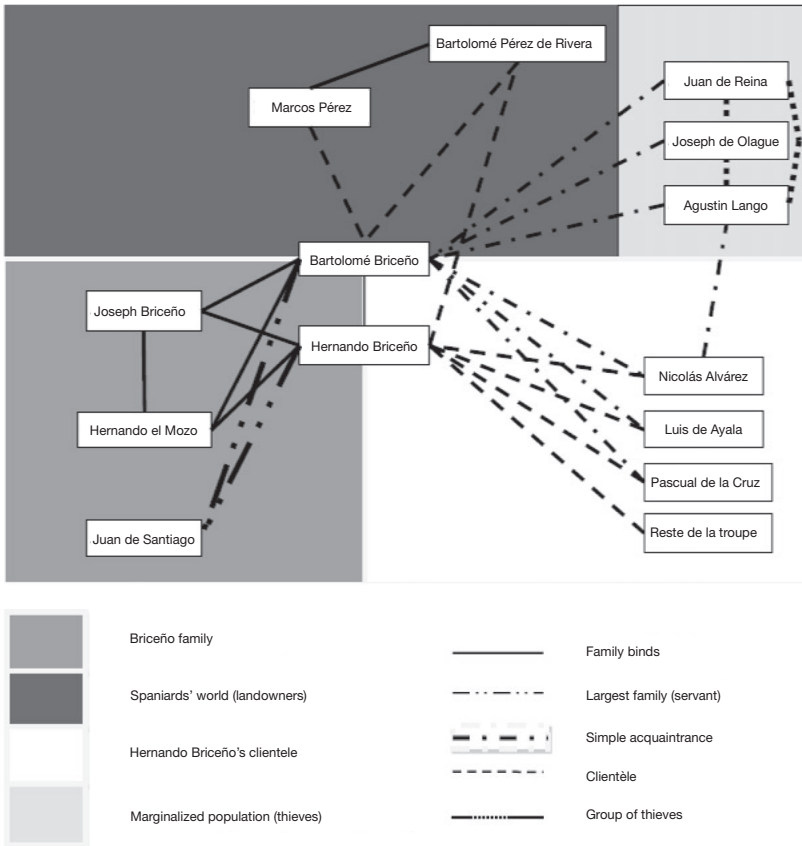


A case of stolen mules in 1707⁴⁴ reveals the family's "intermediary" position. Two members of the family, Juan and Antonio, were accused of having stolen some mules and illegally selling them to Marcos Pérez: the ties between the Briceño and Pérez families were even stronger than it appeared at first. Moreover, this example shows that the process of integration was individual: Hernando's trajectory was not necessarily followed by the rest of his parents. In the end, Hernando was the negotiator: he offered to pay for the stolen mules and to repair the troubles his nephews had caused. This offer indicates he had enough social and economic influence to adopt the attitude of an arbiter.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ AHEZ, Poder judicial, Criminal, Caja 3, Expediente 24.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, f. 6.

FIGURE 3: A COMPLEX NETWORK: THE BRICEÑO FAMILY BETWEEN TWO WORLDS



Both the events of 1707 and 1709 reveal that Hernando Briceño did own the characteristics of a local *cacique* even if he apparently belonged to the *castas* group. This position does not seem to have been challenged by the Spaniards who ordinarily refused to see a *mestizo* having such functions. His circle of influence, represented by his capacity to call people to assist, included Spaniards and *castas* with very different

socio-economic backgrounds. This phenomenon is not very surprising if one considers that *mestizos*, and especially the ones whose fathers were Spaniards, did have a different status from the rest of the *castas*: colonial law was less severe with *mestizos*, under the condition of a legitimate birth. For instance, weapons were forbidden to the *castas*, but *mestizos* could have them as long as they had a place of residence and an occupation.⁴⁶ As a consequence, it appears that *mestizos* did not suffer from the same prejudices and social obstacles as the other *castas*. On the contrary, mulattos always suffered from their slavish background, even if their family had been free for decades. From this point of view, Hernando Briceño's quality of integration is not very surprising and can be explained by his status as a *mestizo*. Furthermore, it is necessary to keep in mind that those individuals could inherit titles, influence, and land from their fathers when they had legitimate origins: maybe that had been the case for Hernando Briceño Senior.

Even if it was not frequent, such a quality of integration can be explained by the special context of the *zacatecana* society. This mining town of northern New Spain is characterized by a strong miscegenation and acculturation. In his study of demography in San Luis Potosí and Charcas, Marcello Carmagnani showed the growing importance of *mestizos* and mulattos in the local demography during the 17th century.

FIGURE 4: DEMOGRAPHY IN THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY
(PERCENTAGES OF CHRISTENINGS)⁴⁷

	Spaniards	Mestizos	mulattos	Castas total
1700–1709	14,6 %	16,8%	10,3%	27,1 %
1710–1719	13 %	21,4%	10,1%	31,5 %

As we can see, the *castas* were twice and even thrice as numerous as the Spaniards in this area. That fact could explain why we can find *mestizos* and mulattos who were modest landowners or held official functions, a position usually reserved to the Spaniards. In those min-

⁴⁶ “Libro VII, título V, ley XIV”: *Recopilación* (note 7).

⁴⁷ Marcello Carmagnani, “Demografía y sociedad”: la estructura social de los centros mineros del norte de México, 1600–1720”: Thomas Calvo (coord.), *Historia y población en México, siglos XVI–XIX* (México, D.F. 1994), p. 419–459.

ing regions, the latter were not numerous enough, which created more opportunities for *castas* to become integrated and achieve upward social mobility. In a nutshell, this particular demography did create more chances of mobility, and some *castas* were able to take them.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we can say that the analysis of a simple criminal event, thanks to the combination of several methods, leads to interesting reflections. First of all, a traditional approach based on social, racial, and economic criteria allowed us to describe the marginalized *castas* and study the stereotypes associated with these people. Finally, the use of networks analysis helped us to examine individuals who often are “forgotten” by historiography because their characteristics do not correspond to the general tendencies. We have been able to measure the level and the quality of their integration and appreciate their intermediary position in the local society.

This kind of polymorphic approach is a way to draw a nuanced painting of the *castas*. They were perceived and rejected as a homogeneous group by the colonial society but were actually heterogeneous from a social, economical, and cultural point of view. The sample we studied thus features individuals like Hernando Briceño and Luis de Ayala in a process of integration, and some others more or less voluntarily marginalized such as the thieves arrested by the *comisario del campo*. Finally, by the example of the Indian servant Juan de Santiago, we were able to approach the combination of *castas* and *amestizados* that constituted the urban mob. Such situations allow us to perceive a population of many faces, oscillating between marginalization, socio-economical stagnation, and integration: these elements can characterize the three faces of the *castas* in the particular context of the area of Zacatecas at the beginning of the 18th century.