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Frieda Koeninger

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**FEMALE,
FRENCH, AND ALONE**
The Case of Luisa de Dufressi
before the Mexican Inquisition
during the Times of Viceroy
Bernardo de Gálvez
(Hero of the Battle of Baton
Rouge and Other Notable Feats)

Frieda Koeninger

*I*n 1701, during the War for Spanish Succession, Philip of Anjou, the grandson of the great Louis the XIV was placed on the Spanish throne, thus initiating the reign of Bourbon monarchs in Spain. The two cousins on the Spanish and French thrones formed a "Family Pact" to officially facilitate cooperation between the two monarchies. Under the Bourbons, Spain as well as her colonies would look to France as a model for many aspects of society. For example, Charles III of Spain, after 1759, in his firm commitment to modernization, initiated a series of reforms to organize Spain, and later Mexico, more efficiently, notably importing from France a

system in which *intendants* replaced a large number of corrupt bureaucrats.¹ The Bourbons also brought with them French fashion and intellectual trends. Colorful clothes designed by French seamstresses were in demand. French barbers were all the rage. French cooks were popular at court and among the elite.² In Mexico, high society acquired French tastes, and "the elite discoursed on the new philosophies emanating from France and England...."³ Bernardo de Gálvez, the viceroy of Mexico from 1785-86, was an example of the "Frenchified" elite of the period, for he had studied military science in France and married a French-speaking woman in New Orleans, Marie Felicie de Saint Maixent. He encouraged French culture by favoring the reading of French philosophers, despite bans by the Inquisition, and he hung several "impious" paintings by French painters in the palace. By all accounts, he and his family were extremely popular.⁴

However, there is evidence that the popularity of French culture in Mexico during the reign of Bernardo Gálvez was superficial. Ordinary Mexicans felt resentment against the French. This resentment may have been misplaced, for instead of channeling their frustrations toward peninsular Spaniards and their offspring, called *criollos*, who held political, ecclesiastical and economic control over Mexico, they directed their frustration toward the French. Even though Bourbon reforms had achieved their intention of improving the economy, "the redistribution of wealth to great extent merely created a new group of wealthy aristocrats."⁵

One such victim of this resentment was Luisa de Dufresi, a French seamstress and entrepreneur arrested by the Mexican Inquisition in 1787. Her story reveals the struggles of a foreign woman to survive in the Mexican society of the period. Two paradoxical tendencies can be observed from Luisa's experiences: on the one hand, the great admiration for the French among the elite, allowing her to advance quickly in Mexican society; on the other hand, a latent xenophobia among common people, such as the seamstresses in her shop, bringing her ultimate downfall. Between these two

¹ Horst Pietschmann, *Las reformas borbónicas y el sistema de intendencias en Nueva España* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

² Jean-Pierre Amalric and Lucienne Domergue, *La España de la Ilustración (1700-1833)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2001), 78-80.

³ Michael C. Meyer and William L. Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 271-72.

⁴ Guillermo Porras Muñoz, *Bernardo de Gálvez* (Madrid: Instituto "González Fernández de Oviedo, 1952), 41-44.

⁵ Meyer and Sherman, *The Course of Mexican History*, 260.

groups—the elite and the lower classes—was the Inquisition, part of the religious elite who looked down on the lower classes but at the same time used them to advance their agenda. The source of information about Luisa de Dufresi is the handwritten case comprising about 300 folios in the extensive files of the Inquisition found in the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City.

The early childhood of Luisa de Dufresi was characterized by tenuous family ties. These weak family bonds would later allow her to pursue an independent lifestyle, but at the same time, as we shall see, the lack of family would place her in a vulnerable position in Mexican society. Luisa was born in Paris, around 1762, and her mother died at her birth. Her father left the child with a wet nurse for several years and then placed her in a convent near Paris. In the convent, she learned to read and write, studied the catechism in French and Latin, and perfected skills related to sewing, embroidery, dress-making and “all the other things appropriate to her sex.”⁶ These skills would be important for her later survival.

When she was ten, her father returned for her and she journeyed with him to Haiti, where his family owned a sugar cane, indigo, and coffee plantation. This move put her back in contact with her family and also with the racism endemic to the Haitian-French society. When she was thirteen, she married Jean Baptiste Molis de Durant, a captain at Port au Prince, and they lived together on the plantation. They had a girl and then a boy; they did not baptize the boy right away, she explained later to the Inquisition, because there were not enough white people to be godparents; it was necessary to wait until there were more, because “no French want blacks, mulattos or members of other infamous castes as godparents” (69v).

When she was nineteen, Luisa's husband died, leaving her heavily in debt. At first, she tried to stay on at the plantation, where her sister, the wife of a secretary to the governor of Haiti, also lived. Her. However, her sister mistreated her, and after only four months, Luisa's independent nature rebelled and she left for Guarico. While she was in Guarico, in March 1782, Bernardo de Gálvez arrived for a short period.⁷ Since Luisa was part of the small minority of white population, she met Gálvez and his wife Marie Felicie, and made friends with them. Luisa was still young, only twenty years, and probably vivacious, and thus ingratiated herself with the couple (70v–71r).

⁶ Volume 1215, f. 70r, Grupo Documental Inquisición, Archivo General de la Nación, México City. Subsequent references to folios in this volume will be shown in parentheses.

⁷ Porras Muñoz, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 27.

Although she was a widow, she was sexually active. Later she would tell her employees in the seamstress shop in Mexico City that "In Guarico, all the women have a man," as if promiscuity were acceptable there (11v). Such was probably not the case. When she became pregnant by Ignacio, the commander of a Spanish frigate, who sailed away without her, she decided to leave Haiti, perhaps because her pregnancy would be frowned upon by her family and by high society. Still in debt, she decided to seek her fortune—or find Ignacio—in Cuba. Gálvez had been sent there, and she hoped that his contact would be advantageous. She took her two children and went off on the French frigate *La Belle Helène* (70v-71r).

At that time, Spain and France were at war with England. The frigate was captured by the British and taken to Charleston, where Luisa was held for five months. When peace came in January 1783 with the Treaty of Paris, she asked to be sent to a Spanish port. She and her children were sent to Cuba, where a baby boy was born. She soon found out that Bernardo de Gálvez had moved to Mexico City as viceroy of New Spain, but she promptly made friends with Governor Inzaga. In fact, she lived in his house for a year (71r), which suggests that due to the prestige of French culture during this period a French-speaking woman could accommodate herself relatively quickly in the Spanish colony of Cuba. Inzaga advised her to go to Mexico City and to "pose as a widow" when she entered Mexico. Evidently, since she had only recently given birth and wished to avoid scandal, she neglected to mention that her husband had died two years earlier. Inzaga's advice demonstrates that he was concerned about Luisa's status as a woman traveling alone and thought that Mexican society might be more accepting of a widow than of a woman who was separated from or abandoned by her husband. Inzaga gave her several letters of introduction to take with her to members of the Mexican elite. She had the boys baptized in Cuba and left all three with different prominent women in Havana (71r-71v). Luisa must have heard about the grandeur of Mexico City and, like many other Europeans, dreamed of making a fortune there and then of returning for the children to take them to Spain or France and live in comfortable retirement.

In Mexico City, with the letters of introduction from Governor Inzaga, she stayed for about two weeks with an official whose wife was from New Orleans. She also renewed her friendship with Gálvez and his wife (71r). She became friends with the Countess de la Torre and her daughter Teresa, who was about the same age as Luisa, now twenty-two years old. The de la Torres were part of the Mexican nobility. Although not millionaires, their income

was about 700,000 pesos a year.⁸ The countess and her daughter both spoke French, and the countess told Luisa the names of priests who could take confession in French (107r). Luisa was undoubtedly pretty and charming, but her French heritage would have been an additional asset that allowed her to make friends with the viceroy and his wife in the first place, and then also with the Mexican elite. It was luck that had provided Luisa with the opportunity to meet Bernardo and Marie Felicie in Haiti. Now, in Mexico City, her friendship with them would have aided her transition into Mexican society.

The Mexican nobility had seamstresses on their household staff, and Luisa could have lived with one such family for years, but she had an independent spirit and could not live a subordinate existence. One family asked her to leave because she became ill frequently and ordered the servants around as if they were at her service (43v).

And Luisa had an entrepreneurial streak and accomplished a feat admirable of a woman—and a foreigner, at that: she borrowed money from several individuals, rented a house on the most fashionable street of Mexico City where she resided and set up a seamstress business; in addition, she had a stall built and placed in the main plaza, where she sold notions and fabrics (71v).

Luisa must have taken full advantage of her heritage and her connections to dazzle her clients. Even though she had been away from France for over ten years, her heritage would have convinced her clients that she must know the latest French fashions. We know that her contacts impressed one of her clients, María de Oscariz, the wife of Cayetano Ximénez, an honorary secretary of the Inquisition. Evidently his source of income was inadequate, for María asked Luisa to talk to the viceroy's wife and recommend Ximénez for a certain position that had opened in the civil bureaucracy. María promised Luisa 4000 *reales* in compensation for her help and gave her some bracelets as an advance for this service (108r–108v).

Luisa's status as a white, well-connected European would have placed her high in the hierarchical pyramid of Mexican society. Her blond hair would have stood out among the crowds of dark-haired Mexicans. The seamstresses whom she employed were members of lower classes, darker skinned than she. Moreover, they were illiterate, while Luisa was a fairly well educated woman, although her Spanish was poor. However, Luisa's status was precarious for three interconnected reasons: her lack of family ties, her unstable finances and her sexual mores. Without the safety net of an extended family to help

⁸ Doris Ladd, *The Mexican Nobility at independence 1780–1826* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 219.

her emotionally and financially, she could easily fall into debt and end up in the new debtors' prison or in the poor house. Arrom's study of the poor house in Mexico City during this period shows that there was a direct relationship between family disintegration and impoverishment.⁹ As for her sexual mores, she had already borne one illegitimate child but had been able to hide this fact from her Mexican friends. If she became pregnant again, this could affect her status negatively. Although there were illegitimate children among the Mexican elite, large families were able to dissipate the stigma in various ways, as Lavrin has shown.¹⁰ But Luisa, a woman alone, with no male protector, and an orphan, with no family connections, could become defenseless—or an easy target of others' wrath, a scapegoat for their frustrations.

The little seamstress shop was, to a certain extent, a microcosm of Mexican society. In order to understand this, the ethnic makeup of the period needs to be examined. The population of colonial Mexico was uniquely hybrid in nature, produced by the mixed blood of white Europeans, native Indians and black Africans. In the eighteenth century, there was an attempt to classify the various degrees of mixed blood and numerous sets of paintings of the period illustrate vividly this attempt. Each of these paintings depicts a couple and one offspring, with a brief text alluding to the racial mix, such as Spanish man and Indian woman beget Mestizo; Mestizo man and Spanish woman beget *castizo*. The paintings represent sixteen to eighteen mixes. Magali Carrera has pointed out that this classification "was an attempt to come to grips with hybridity and the resulting ambiguity of an individual's identity."¹¹ At the time, there was a great fluidity, for many of mixed ethnicity passed as Spaniards. The classification does not reflect the reality so much as the anxiety of the elite "over their inability to keep colonial people in separate and distinct spheres."¹² Carrera also affirms that these categories cannot be seen as exclusively racial, or biological, but more as a reflection of a category called "*calidad*," literally "quality," a general reference to one's social status as reflected not only in skin color but also

⁹ Silvia M. Arrom, "Desintegración familiar y pauperización: los indigentes del Hospicio de Pobres de la ciudad de México, 1795," in *Familia y vida privada en la historia de Iberoamérica*, ed. Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru and Cecilia Rabell Romero (Mexico City: Colegio de México; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996), 119–31.

¹⁰ Asunción Lavrin, "Sexuality in Colonial Mexico: A Church Dilemma," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 47–95.

¹¹ Magali Marie Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 36–37.

¹² Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 43.

in dress, speech and behavior. Inherent qualities of Spaniards were "legitimacy, purity of blood, honor, law-abidingness, wealth and nobility," whereas inherent attributes of the castes were "illegitimacy, impure blood, debasement, criminality, poverty, plebeian status and manual labor."¹³

Luisa's employees differed from her in various ways, but most notably in their ethnicity. Juliana Moreno, forty years old, was a member of the *castiza* class, that is, having three grandparents of Spanish blood, and one of Indian blood. Micaela Reyna, eighteen, was a *Mestiza*, half Indian and half Spanish. María Josefa Aguilar was twenty-five and the only one who was married. Vicenta Llanos was single and thought she was about twenty-eight years of age. They considered themselves to be *españolas*, that is of European blood, though born in Mexico City. Ygnacia Cuevas, sixteen, thought she was *española* also. In addition there were a pair of eight-year old twins, white French-speaking slaves from Haiti, lent to Luisa by Marie Felicie, the viceroy's wife.

An incident happened that partly illustrates the racial tensions in Mexican society and in the seamstress shop. One day an Indian walked by selling his wares: fascinating and imaginative little wax figures of animals and little devils with horns. A Frenchman who was renting a room in the same house as Luisa showed her one of these little figures, and they admired the unusual craftsmanship. The Frenchman was collecting such figures to take back to France and sell. Luisa found the little horned figure hilarious, and so she showed it to the seamstresses, and they laughed, too. Then, she pointed it to Vicenta and said, "Look at your father!" (55r). When Luisa waived the little figure at Vicenta and teasingly called it her father, she was probably referring to Vicenta's Indian blood. We may guess that Luisa thought Vicenta's skin was dark, although Vicenta considered herself *española*. We know that Luisa looked down on people of color, for, as previously mentioned, she lamented the excess of "infamous castes" in Haiti.

This incident could have gone unnoticed outside the confines of the seamstress shop. However, María Josefa Aguilar, the only one who was married, commented about this and other incidents to her husband. He dutifully wrote a note to a deputy of the Inquisition informing him that Luisa had committed several heresies (3r). This was a frequent occurrence: a woman made the first accusation, but she had been urged to do so by a man, if not her husband, then her confessor. Soon, in February 1786, the deputy called in María Josefa and questioned her (3r). From her testimony, the names of

¹³ Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain*, 37.

other seamstresses were gathered, they were summoned, and a case began to form against Luisa. These depositions reveal the women's resentments against Luisa primarily because of her national origin.

María Josefa told the deputy that Luisa had had a little wax devil made, and said to Vicenta, "Look at this, the God of the Spaniards" (3v). By misinterpreting Luisa's original comment, "Look at your father," Josefa changed the racial comment to one of religious significance, a heretical statement. In addition, the incident with the little wax devil reveals ethnic tensions that were less overt. The accuser acted shocked by the demon and supposed that the foreign woman had it made because she was a pagan. María Josefa ignored the fact that the Indian had made it; it was a part of Mexican cultural history that she preferred to deny. The seamstresses' nervous laughter about the demon concealed their shock at facing their own heritage. They then misdirected their alarm toward the foreigner, Luisa. The Indian was not a pagan; he had found something from his aesthetic heritage that was valued by foreigners and was able to sell it to them for a few pesos to feed his family, as that was a year of great famine in Mexico.¹⁴ The Inquisition did not pursue the Indian; very early on the Tribunal was legally prohibited from investigating Indians. This was one reason that the Mexican Inquisitors—not the Spanish—in their interrogations asked what caste each person belonged to. María Josefa and Vicenta, by calling themselves *españolas*, were denying that they had any Indian blood, and thus showed prejudices similar to Luisa's. This also suggests that the anxiety felt by the elite, mentioned by Carrera in her study of the *casta* paintings, was felt by the lower class: they feared being classified in the category of a lower caste.

María Josefa's initial accusation also revealed another point of tension in the microcosm of the seamstress shop: religious practices. Although Luisa was a Catholic like the women who surrounded her, the Catholicism practiced in Mexico was different from that practiced in France, and this caused misunderstandings. For example, there were many more processions than she was accustomed to. A French writer, the Chevalier de Bourgoanne, who lived in Spain for ten years, from 1777-1797, expressed similar views of processions in his *Travels in Spain*, which he wrote with the intention of righting the "prejudices which the rest of Europe entertains with regard to Spain even at the present day."¹⁵ Although in general his portrait of Spaniards is very posi-

¹⁴ Porras Muñoz, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 42.

¹⁵ The Chevalier de Bourgoanne, *Travels in Spain*, Volume 5, in *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World* (London: Strahan and Preston, 1809), 298.

tive, his description of religious processions approaches the comic because he juxtaposes them with popular plays staged on the theater of the day:

If the holy sacrament be carried anywhere, a bell is rung to announce it. All business then, all conversation is suspended; and every one falls on his knees till it passes by. Here arises many a burlesque scene. How often have I seen the play interrupted all at once by the sound of the holy bell! Spectators, actors, however dressed, Moors, Jews, Angels, even devils, all without exception, turn towards the entrance from the street, fall on one knee, and remain in that posture as long as the sound continues to be heard.¹⁶

Thus, Luisa also must have been similarly astounded at the processions that passed outside her house and business. She lived across from La Profesa, an important church in Mexico City, a few doors down from the largest Franciscan church, and only a block from the Cathedral.

María Josefa declared that Luisa refused to kneel as the other women did when a procession went by with a saint (4r). Frequently, a procession passed by the shop with the image of Christ or the Holy Mother; work stopped and the employees knelt and crossed themselves. There was a procession for Saint Clara, Saint Phillip of Jesus and Saint Thomas the Apostle. Especially important was the procession during the Corpus Christi celebration of the Eucharist, a celebration that still today lasts several days in central Mexico. In her defense, Luisa would later declare that she believed all this to be excessive. She was skeptical of the devotion of the seamstresses: every procession that went by seemed to be an excuse to stop working, so she admonished them to return to their work.

María Josefa submitted other evidence questioning Luisa's piety. Luisa did not go to confession nor did she take communion. Furthermore, she did not believe in the Virgin of Guadalupe. She ate meat on Fridays and during Lent as well, and she spoke against the Inquisition. On one occasion during Lent, Luisa scandalously organized a party to which men had to buy entrance tickets; the seamstresses spent that day getting ready for the party and forgot that it was the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. Some of María Josefa's remarks revealed her anti-Semitism; for instance, she said, "This French woman is a Jew," after Luisa had Vicenta arrested for stealing (3v). As an entrepreneur, Luisa was striving to make a profit, but any reference she made to money

¹⁶ Bourgoanne, *Travels in Spain*, 308.

caused the seamstresses to suspect she was a Jew, as when she told them at different times, "First is work, then mass." María Josefa continued that she couldn't affirm with certainty that Luisa was a heretic or a Jew, but she always became irritated when they spoke about matters of faith (4v).

As far as education is concerned, all of Luisa's employees were illiterate; none could even sign her own name. Their lack of a basic education reinforces the evidence that they were of a lower class, because in colonial Mexico there were primary schools for girls, called *amigas*, but "a high economic level was . . . an indispensable condition for a woman to be able to dedicate herself to studies."¹⁷ However, as Pilar Gonzalbo Aispuru points out, it would be unfair to call them uneducated. They had enough training in dressmaking that they could earn a meager sustenance from their skills. They also were educated in religious customs and beliefs, whether by mothers, aunts, grandmothers, priests or friars. Being illiterate, their religious training would have been oral and based on traditions and practice, not theology.¹⁸ They could not explain complex theology, but they had a sense of what heresy was, of what beliefs and practices were condemned by the Church. They also were aware of the role that the Inquisition had in controlling deviant behavior and of their duty to report suspect behavior to the Inquisition—especially if encouraged to do so by a male.

An important aspect of María Josefa's original accusation was sexual in nature, pointing to another point of latent tension among the women in the seamstress shop: sexual mores. According to María Josefa, Luisa had an "indecorous friendship" with a French doctor, Esteban Morel (15v). Morel had visited various places around the Caribbean. He was married to a Venezuelan woman but had left her in Caracas. He had met Bernardo de Gálvez in New Orleans, when Gálvez was governor of Louisiana. Morel couldn't bear the climate in Louisiana and decided to move to Mexico City in 1778. The following year, 1779, he was asked to organize inoculations during a smallpox epidemic. At the time that he knew Luisa, he was living "in incontinence" with a chambermaid employed in his home in Mexico City, and the Inquisition opened a case against him around the same time.¹⁹

¹⁷ Josefina Muriel, *Cultura Femenina Novohispana* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1994), 18.

¹⁸ Pilar Gonzalbo Aispuru, *Historia de la educación en la época colonial: La educación de los criollos y la vida urbana* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 1990), 319–39.

¹⁹ Liliana Schifter Aceves, *Medicina, minería e Inquisición en la Nueva España: Esteban Morel (1744–1795)* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2002), 37.

As happened in the Inquisitional investigations, the deputy asked María Josefa to name witnesses. Also, as was routine, the deputy swore her to secrecy. One by one, the inquisitional authorities called in the other seamstresses and a few others. Vicenta made her deposition in March 1786; a tailor, Mariano Rendón, was called in April. Juliana made her statement in May.

At the same time, Luisa was falling into debt. When she set up household, she borrowed 474 pesos from José Mariano Avila y Flores to buy plates, bowls, platters, silverware and knives and had paid him back within three months. But she began to overextend herself with other merchants. She bought silks, linens and taffetas imported from France, Italy, and Spain, as well as cheaper muslins for underwear or linings, multicolored ribbons, scarves, appliqués of flowers made with little pearls, gold cord, and other notions related to her trade. Her account with José González in 1785 was typical: she bought 536 pesos of goods, but after several months had paid only 106 pesos. In addition, she had a problem with Vicenta. Luisa accused Vicenta of stealing, and she was detained in the new debtors' prison. Luisa undoubtedly felt pressured and worried about the progression of her debts. Dressmaking was not well paid, and her hopes of supporting herself were fading.

Furthermore, María de Oscariz and Cayetano Ximénez asked Luisa to return the bracelets that they had used to pay her to lobby the viceroy's wife for a better job for the husband, but Luisa had already sold them. Next, unfortunately for Luisa, Ignacia quit and went to work for the Ximénez family, and Ignacia told them more tales about Luisa. Soon Ximénez, knowing well the procedures of the Inquisition, wrote a letter to the tribunal telling them of Luisa's heretical views. For the second time, a man contacted the Inquisition to pass on information heard by his wife. Ximénez, one might speculate, was on the margins of the upper class and unable to advance himself as he had hoped. Perhaps resentful against the elite who held economic and social power, he channeled this resentment against Luisa, a French woman who represented the elite in his mind and who was a vulnerable target.

The tribunal called in María de Oscariz as well as Ignacia and Ignacia's mother. These witnesses confirmed some of María Josefa's accusations and especially painted a portrait of a sexually liberal woman. For example, Luisa reportedly said, "Fornication for love is not a sin; only fornication for money" (16v; 19v). Other sacrilegious statements with sexual overtones were reported, such as "If the statues of saints were made of flesh, I would kiss them" (28r) and "If Saint Phillip of Jesus were a doll, I would adore dolls" (24v). Also, the other seamstresses were suspicious of the friendship that Luisa had with Dr. Morel. They could hear laughing in a back room when he visited her.

In addition, Ignacia's mother told the inquisitors that her daughter told her that once Luisa was ill because of "the lack of flow of blood" (32r). Perhaps this meant that she had missed her period. Dr. Morel prescribed Luisa to drink a tea made with saffron, and the mother was shocked about such a prescription "because of its well-known bad side effects," but she did not tell her daughter "so as not to open her eyes" (32r). Her comment seems to indicate a folk belief that saffron tea could have an abortive effect.

By August 1786, Luisa owed over 2300 pesos. She closed down her business, left Mexico City, sold her clothes in the city of Puebla, and went to the Gulf port of Veracruz. One of her creditors, Francisco García de Berdeja, whom she owed 182 pesos, became alarmed about her flight from the capital. He was angry with her also because, after he had lent her money, she spoke ill of him. Berdeja went to the civil authorities and requested help in collecting the debt. And he complained to Viceroy Gálvez, who ordered the governor of Veracruz to detain Luisa (63r). Obviously, Berdeja's connection to the viceroy was much stronger than any tie of friendship that Luisa might have had.

If Luisa still harbored any hope of appealing to Gálvez or his wife for support, such hope would soon be dissipated, for in September 1786, Bernardo de Gálvez took ill, became progressively worse and died on 30 November. On 11 December, his young widow gave birth to their third child, named Guadalupe. The following May, Marie Felicie and the children left for Spain.²⁰ The twin slaves were sent to work for Marie Felicie's sister, whose husband was the governor of Michoacán, in central Mexico (84v).

Meanwhile, Luisa had lived in the house of a prominent official in Veracruz for about six months until she was sent back to Mexico City. Civil officials in the capital did not recall anything about her debts and she was released. Also, she paid Berdeja with two watches, one of which he was able to sell to cover all she owed him, except two pesos. She lived for a month and a half with a friend, and then borrowed enough money to start up a little business again, a couple of blocks on the other side of the Cathedral, paying a carpenter to start building another stall (45r).

Meanwhile, Cayetano Ximénez nursed his resentment against Luisa for keeping the bracelets and not helping him obtain better employment. He did not have the connections with civil authorities that Berdeja had, but regrettably for Luisa, his links with the ecclesiastical authorities were strong. He had already been instrumental in the Tribunal's heresy case against her. Now he

²⁰ Porras Muñoz, *Bernardo de Gálvez*, 46-49.

was vigilant in locating her. The Inquisition had found out about her venture to Veracruz, her detention there and her return to the capital. They heard a rumor that she was in the debtors' prison, but their inquiry to the warden led to naught. One day Ximénez saw Luisa walking down the street, tracked down her new address and reported this new information to the Inquisition (38v). This man, whose position in society was frustratingly too low for him to obtain a job in the civil bureaucracy, must have felt empowered by his connection to the Inquisition. On 15 September 1787, about a year and a half after the first accusation, the Tribunal of the Inquisition, fearful that she might disappear again and now with the new information of her whereabouts, ordered Luisa's arrest (54r). Reiterating, three men were key to Luisa's fall into the hands of the Inquisition: Aguilar, Berdeja and Ximénez. Luisa's arrest was unusually precipitous. The tribunal of the Mexican Inquisition often worked at a very slow pace. Their procedures usually took years, and many cases did not end in arrest. Perhaps they feared that she would attempt to leave the area again. Perhaps she was especially vulnerable, owing over 2000 pesos. She still was in contact with several countesses in the Mexican elite, but she now had no hopes of protection from a viceroy.

Luisa, sitting in cell number 22 of the Inquisitional jail, knew that her problems were even worse: she was five months pregnant. It's not clear by whom, but possibly the father was her friend and compatriot, Dr. Morel. Whoever he was, he did not come to her aid. On 20 September, she was ushered into the chamber of the tribunal to take her first deposition in the presence of Inquisitor Rodríguez de Carasa and a secretary. As was routine, she was asked to tell about her ancestors, her relatives and the story of her life. She spoke as if her husband were still alive, and said that she had gone to Veracruz to see him five months previously, and then he had embarked on a ship to New Orleans. The inquisitor asked her to recite the Lord's Prayer, the rosary and the creed in French and Latin, which she did very well, and he noted that "she responded to other questions about the doctrine with a great deal of knowledge" (70r).

Following the Inquisition's normal procedure, she was asked why she thought she had been detained. On 20 and 22 September, she answered that she did not know why. Each time, Carasa warned her, "The Holy Office does not arrest anyone without merit" (72v), and sent her back to her cell to reflect. When asked on 1 October, she replied that she must have been arrested because of her debts to various creditors. She stated that Berdeja had been pressuring her to pay him and then she was arrested and put in the debtors' prison, so her arrest by the ecclesiastical court must have been for the same

reason. Instead of dismissing this idea, the inquisitor asked her for more information about her debts, which she provided (56r-66r), probably confirming in her mind that her arrest was directly related to her creditors.

On 31 October, the tribunal moved Luisa to a convent for the remainder of her pregnancy, and paid the convent 12 pesos a month for her food and care (62r). Meanwhile, the Inquisitors continued with their investigation. They located the twins in Michoacán but decided that they were too young to approach for questioning (87r-88v). They interviewed Micaela, who confirmed testimony by the other seamstresses. At the same time, Micaela commented that Luisa barely spoke Spanish. This information could help Luisa, but would the tribunal view it that way? Worst of all for Luisa, they received information from a priest in Havana who had spoken to Luisa's daughter, Juana María Sofía. The ten-year old told about their stay in Charleston, and said that her mother had married an Englishman while there; with his help, they were able to go to Havana. Now, in the tribunal's eye, the case against Luisa was even stronger: she was obviously a bigamist.

In February 1788, forty days after the birth of her child, Luisa was returned to cell 22. Again, she was called up to the great hearing room of the tribunal before Inquisitor Rodríguez de Carasa. He asked her if she had anything else to say; that is, he gave her the opportunity to confess. She answered "No," still believing that she had been detained for her financial debt. Then, the prosecuting Inquisitor Bergosa presented the charges against her. After the twenty-three charges were read to her, Carasa introduced two lawyers to her, for her to choose from to defend her. She chose Juan Cienfuegos. In the following days, she was called back to the tribunal. Each accusation was read again and she responded to each. At first, she thought she could continue to sustain before the tribunal that she was a married woman and that all her pregnancies were by her husband, but soon she realized the seriousness of the charges and the depth of her situation.

Bergosa's accusations started with a general statement. Luisa was raised in the ways of "true Catholics," but she had entirely abandoned her obligations and followed the "impure and abominable societies of Calvin, Luther, Wyclef, and other ancient and modern heretics" (95v). Her deeds and words disparaged the sacraments of penitence, communion, continence, abstinence and others. The first accusation stated that despite having been brought up in "the very Catholic kingdom of France in the celebrated city of Paris" (96r), she had allowed her passions to dominate her and to neglect the Catholic faith in which she was baptized. Accusation number two brought up her move to Guarico and marriage, "in which she could obtain her final purpose

and be saved" (96r), but instead of staying with her husband, as she should have, she allowed him to absent himself alone. Then she demonstrated a lack of gratitude toward her sister by leaving her and going off on the frigate, being subsequently captured and taken to Charleston. Bergosa continued with the opinion that "it is not credible...that she did not speak on points of religion while there, and it is equally logical that she abandoned her customs and upbringing, taking into account the fragility of her sex, her age and the impoverished circumstances in which she found herself" (96v). The third accusation was a logical sequence in the mind of the accuser: while in Charleston, Luisa married an Englishman, and she went to Havana after he died. "If, as she says, her first husband, Jean Baptiste is alive she is therefore a prisoner for the crime of polygamy, and therefore she should reveal under what rites and ceremonies she married the Englishman, his name, was he a Catholic or a heretic" (97r). The result of this, in Bergosa's mind, expressed in the fourth accusation, was that once she was in Mexico City, Luisa made the heretical statement, "God does not condemn the English" (97r). Accusation five referred to her alleged opinion that anyone whose deeds were good would not be condemned even if he were not a Catholic. The sixth told about the incident with the little wax demon, in which Luisa supposedly called it the "God of the Spaniards" (97v).

On 12 February, Luisa responded to the first six accusations, without being candid about her relationships. To Bergosa's general statement, she responded, "although she is not a saint, she has not committed heresy, she has always kept the Catholic religion, in which she has resided, and in which she hopes to live and die, and she asks forgiveness to God for her sins" (101v). She agreed that she was brought up with good principles and denied that she had wavered from the teachings of the Church. She said that she "could not remedy the absence of her husband, neither was she able to go with him because his departure was secretive due to a legal battle with his brothers for an inheritance" (101v). She said that she embarked on the French frigate in search of her husband's family. She denied having married an Englishman in Charleston. She was in Charleston for five months, her child was born two months after she arrived in Havana; therefore, he couldn't have been an Englishman's child. About the fourth accusation, Luisa recalled that once, in conversation, someone commented, "The English go straight to hell, the French barely make it to heaven, and the Spanish go straight to heaven" (102r). She laughed at this, and said, "If Protestants recognize their errors and ask for forgiveness, they can be saved," but "she hardly spoke a word of Spanish then so she could have been misunderstood" (102r). Flatly denying

the fifth accusation, Luisa gave a detailed account of the incident with the wax demon, naming the Frenchman who bought it. After this testimony, Luisa was sent back to her cell with the usual admonition "to still think it over well and to tell the truth" (102v).

This time, she did ruminate on her circumstances and was ready to speak with more honesty about her sexual past when summoned to the hearing room on 16 February. Luisa declared that "to relieve her conscience and because of the oath she has taken, she confesses what she has silenced up to now because of fear or sham" (103r). She told them about the death of her husband and her relationship with Ignacio, the frigate commander. She never became involved with any Englishman. She declared that her latest pregnancy resulted from her visit in Veracruz with Ignacio, whose last name she did not recall. He had promised to take her to Havana for her children and take them all to Cádiz to live. She was about to depart hidden on his frigate when she was detained by order of the governor (103v).

On 18, 23 and 26 February, Luisa continued her testimony, responding to each of the remaining twenty-three charges. Many of the accusations referred to her lax observation of church precepts. She denied each one, saying that she confessed and took communion, and naming the priests who could confirm this. She fasted during Lent, and usually ate fish anyway, because she did not like meat. She certainly believed in the saints, and especially the Virgin of Guadalupe. To the claim that she had lived illicitly with a man, she replied that if she had wanted to do that she certainly would not have done it with seven women as witnesses! She admitted making a number of scandalous statements but asserted that they were only in jest, an effective argument with the Inquisition, which tended to dismiss things said jokingly or when drunk. Several allegations were a result of a seamstress's misunderstandings or grudge. For example, to the assertion that she had said that in France they take communion with bread and it is not obligatory, she began her defense by explaining that the seamstresses who worked for her often questioned her about religion. Vicenta once asked her about communion and she began explaining: "As everywhere, the priest takes both species, bread and wine, and the rest of the people under the species of bread." Then Vicenta asked her what "species" meant. She answered, "Transubstantiation." Again she asked, "What is transubstantiation?" so Luisa explained this term to Vicenta, but, Luisa clarified, "perhaps she misunderstood because of my weak Spanish" (104v). Bergosa also accused Luisa of speaking ill of the Inquisition and of abhorring a certain woman because she was married to a minister of the Inquisition. Luisa responded that until now, she hadn't understood what the

Inquisition was; she thought they could detain people for their debts. She guessed correctly that the "certain woman" was María de Oscariz and told how she and her husband were resentful against her, after their fruitless petition for his employment, and they persuaded three or four of Luisa's servants to leave and work for them. Whatever ill the servants said about her was only out of adulation for their new employer (107r). These were good tactics on Luisa's part in that she named the correct persons and affirmed their resentments against her, arguments that might convince the Inquisitors.

Bergosa reiterated the indictment by alleging that even after she was imprisoned, "she remained obstinate and negative, contrary to the common debility of her fragile sex" (100v). Thus, if she did not fit the standards expected of her gender, specifically that of weakness, she was showing stubbornness, not strength of character. For Bergosa, her assertiveness in the face of adversity was further proof of her guilt. Summarizing her offenses, Bergosa declared that "the libertine, incontinent and lustful life of this prisoner; her suspicious origin, and the infections from the countries through which she has traveled, her long and intimate relationship with foreigners, and with heretics; her dominating vices of ambition and lust, the root of most heresies; her absurd and suspicious propositions" (100v), all pointed to the gravity of her transgressions. He added that she should be placed under "question of torment" (101r) if she continued to deny the accusations. Luisa responded forcefully and with courage. She stated simply that she "has not committed crimes other than those already confessed, nor has she incurred in any kind of heresy, because she has always lived in the Catholic religion, and she wants to live in it until her death; the sins that she has confessed have come from her fragility, and she asks God and this Holy Tribunal forgiveness of them, and that even if she is put to the question of torment she would not say any other things because all that she has declared is the truth under the oath she has made" (109v). Luisa did well to call their bluff: they had not used the torture chamber for seventeen years.²¹

Nevertheless, she must have experienced great anguish in the following months, not knowing what would happen, when she would be called again to the chamber of the tribunal, or when she might be released. She did not

²¹ I base this statement on an investigation about treatment of prisoners in the Mexican Inquisition ordered by the Supreme Council in Madrid. One interview was of warden Angel de la Puerta, in July 1803. He stated that he had not seen any torture since "the days of Inquisitor Amestoy," who left Mexico in 1771. Volume 1506, f. 524r, Grupo Documental Inquisición, Archivo General de la Nación, México City.

understand the tribunal's procedure. This psychological impact on prisoners was the strength of the Inquisition. In cell 22, there was a small window near the ceiling that let some light and air in. The large metal door had a small metal window that could be opened by the jailer to check on her and to pass food to her. She would have been served four meals a day: hot chocolate, spiced with chile powder, with a roll morning and late evening; a stew with tortillas in the afternoon; a plate of beans in the early evening. If the jailers followed the rules, she would be taken to a sunny courtyard for an hour or so, once a week, so that her cell could be cleaned.²² She wouldn't be allowed to see any other prisoner. She could hear the bells from the church of Santo Domingo across the street at different intervals during the day, and perhaps this sound—and her medal of the Virgin of Guadalupe—gave her strength and hope. In March and April, the temperatures would have risen in Mexico City as the dry season began to peak. Soon the rainy season would start and the cell would become colder.

Meanwhile, in the tribunal, there had been a change. The Inquisitor Rodriguez de Carasa was recalled and sent to head the Inquisition in Llorena, Spain. According to José Toribio Medina, in his monumental history of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico, Carasa and Bergosa, who was prosecuting Luisa's case, were enemies, and their feud had made the situation so unbearable that Carasa was moved.²³ Also, a new prosecutorial inquisitor, José Pereda y Chávez, was appointed along with his aid, Bernardo Prado y Ovejero. Would these changes affect Luisa's precarious situation? Perhaps it caused part of the delay, although the Inquisition was notoriously slow. In any case, finally on 6 June 1788, Luisa was called again to the tribunal, and this time the inquisitor was the veteran Juan de Mier y Villar. He presented to her and her lawyer, Juan Cienfuegos, the list of proofs and witnesses against her (112v).

During several audiences for the next few weeks, Luisa responded again to the charges against her. A small amount of information about each of nine witnesses was presented and the list of accusations of each witness. Although names were not given, from the ages and other data, it was clear that the witnesses were six seamstresses, a tailor, María de Oscariz, and María Francisca Ojeda, Ignacia's mother. Luisa answered once more, deny-

²² Volume 1506; ff. 460v-461r, Grupo Documental Inquisición, Archivo General de la Nación, México City.

²³ José Toribio Medina, *Historia del Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la inquisición en México* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1998), 453.

ing what she had already denied, reiterating what she had already confessed and clarifying some points. For example, about the saffron tea, she said that she had seen Dr. Moreno and Dr. Morel, but neither had treated her with saffron tea. She often drank saffron tea with cinnamon because it did her well, and she never had a problem with her flow of blood (121r). She reiterated that "although she had committed the sins of fragility that she has already confessed, in Mexico she has always lived dedicated to her work without giving a bad example, nor in communicating in impure conduct with a man, and that she has dealt with decent and honest persons" (120r). She admitted that on one holy day she did not allow the twins to go to mass "because they lacked shoes, or scarves or mantillas." However, that was not her fault, but that of Gálvez's wife. A copy of the list of "witnesses and evidence" and her responses were given to her and her lawyer, at the cost of 17 pesos, on 4 July (110v).

With this information, Prosecutor Bergosa's charges and Luisa's responses from testimony the previous February, the lawyer wrote a formal defense. Cienfuegos delivered the defense to the tribunal in August 1788, and he did a very competent job. He requested that all charges be dismissed. He asserted that the witnesses were not trustworthy. They sometimes contradicted each other; sometimes what they said was only hearsay. He objected that there were not enough witnesses. Also, he denied that she failed to follow the mandates of the Church. A primary accusation was that she didn't take the holy sacraments. He said that this was false; Padre Bocanegra could testify that he took confession regularly from her in French. Luisa denied that she had behaved indecorously. She swore that she prayed devoutly to the Virgin of Guadalupe, visiting her shrine frequently; the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was one of the objects in the inventory of her belongings when she was arrested (53r-60r).

Cienfuegos also pointed out the prejudices and lack of education of the employees. He wrote, "Her servants bothered her constantly with questions about religion, and this proves what I already said, that since she could barely pronounce Castilian, they suspected that she was not a Catholic, with no more foundation than the common impression that since she was a foreigner she must be a heretic, and "they understood her words in a sense that she did not express" (53v). For example, she explained "transubstantiation to the servants in a way that manifests her good instruction for a woman of this century" (55r) but "since it was something new for the servants, and they lack this instruction, they probably did not even understand it" (55r). The defense lawyer wrote the following:

Since she spoke little Spanish, the seamstresses could have misunderstood her badly formed words, and could have easily mistaken her words; in this way do the common people react to anything that is not Spanish, but foreign: because they believe erroneously that just because the person is a foreigner, he is a Jew. And this can be verified with a person who speaks Castilian perfectly, what should we think in the case of those who speak it badly? (55r)

He furthermore stated that Luisa, after openly confessing to certain sins, had continually denied her guilt about other ones. This, Cienfuegos emphasized, was "also proof that in her conscience she does not have another sin, except the fragility she confessed, even though it was not known; her negative on the other points, in a weak sex, convinces one of the truth of her confession" (58r). Thus, he turned upside down Bergosa's argument that her obstinate denial, "contrary to the common debility of her fragile sex" manifested her guilt (100v).

In September, Inquisitor Mier called into the tribunal friars Garcia Figueroa and Manuel Camino, who had written the original Classification of Words and Deeds, based on Bergosa's accusations, and he requested that they reexamine that document along with her "confessions" and responses, the list of witnesses and proofs, and the lawyer's defense statement (61r). Mier seemed to imply that they should reconsider. Their answer, dated 11 September, was thoughtful although still condemning. It is significant because it reveals the social tension inherent in the work of the Inquisitors, because it shows their scorn for the lower classes, from which accusations often sprang. The friars began by saying that there was no need to add or remove any of the original accusations. The friars recognized the validity of part of Cienfuegos's defense, when they noted the following:

She confesses and takes communion, and other Christian practices; she is French and she expresses herself badly in Spanish, which could have caused the witnesses to misunderstand her, especially since these are crude people, adding to this the ill opinion that they formed of her for being a foreigner. Ordinary people fear foreigners might have false beliefs, and are accustomed to saying: "This is a Jew." So they looked at her suspiciously and asked her many questions to see if she was a Catholic. (65r)

Despite this, the friars felt that her statements were similar to those of Lutherans and Calvinists, among whom she had lived. The similarity between her words and these heresies could not be dismissed as a misunderstanding because of her poor Spanish. Since the witnesses were "crude and uncultured," they testified in a simple manner, coinciding with each other in such a way that they seemed to be truthful. In the end, the friars left an opening for a possible acquittal with the caveat that they were adhering to their role as "Ministers of Classification" and were abstaining from giving a legal opinion (66r).

Mier continued the investigation and on 25 September finally received a document that was very supportive of her: the report from her confessor, Bocanegra. Interestingly, he noted that she was a woman alone, "a free woman, without father, nor mother, nor husband, nor master, nor any person who compelled her to confess" (68v). Still, she displayed clear evidence of her goodness by sending for the priest and telling him that she wanted to confess. In her confession in the French language, she expressed herself "with as much clarity and integrity as could any truly Christian woman, desirous of salvation" (68v). She confessed to him once a week "without being called or forced, but only because she wanted to" (68v). Furthermore, she was always dressed very modestly, her head and face covered with a shawl. He went on to say that one week she didn't go to confession and a few days later, he ran into Manuela de Orio, the wife of the Treasurer of the Mint, in whose home Luisa had stayed on her arrival in Mexico. She exclaimed to him, "Father, commend to God the French woman who confessed with you, because they say that she is in the Inquisition, that some soldiers went for her the other night and took her" (69r). Later, three different people assured him that she had died in the Inquisition. He hadn't heard about her again until he received the query from the tribunal. To find out more information for his report, he sought out Manuela de Orio and her daughter and asked them if they had noted in Luisa "any fault or error against the faith, against the Catholic religion, either blasphemy, heresy, or lack of religiosity" (69r). They both responded, "No, father, absolutely nothing, neither in word, nor deed, nor action; only that she liked to fix up, and adorn herself" (69r). They also noted that she never crossed herself, but she had a religious medal hanging from her neck and she had a religious stamp and an image of Christ over her bed. Bocanegra continued, "I have known many French who do not know how to cross themselves, and they have told me that it is because in their countries, they have not been taught . . . but I have found them to be very Christian Catholics" (69v). The priest culminated his four pages of praise for Luisa by telling that once she

had an accident and was on the brink of death, unconscious, but she recovered and the next day went to look for him to confess and take communion. This, in his opinion, was "a clear demonstration of Christianity, faith and religion" (69v). Bocanegra took confession from Luisa during the first weeks of her pregnancy and during the period of an illicit relationship. Did she not confess everything, or did Bocanegra choose not to reveal what he knew?

Still, months went by, and Luisa spent another cool winter and warm spring in her cell. Finally, on 4 May 1789, the tribunal made a decision. Outside of her presence, Inquisitors Mier, Prado and Pereda, along with one representative from the archbishop's office and another from the civil government, all signed a brief document. They stated simply that because of her confusing explanations in Spanish and the poor intellectual credit of the witnesses, she was absolved (71r). At last, Luisa was found not guilty, or, in the Church's terms, pardoned of all wrongdoing. A few days later, the authorities brought her once again to the great tribunal, read her the good news, and then—as was their custom—presented the bill to her for her care in the twenty-onemonths since her arrest. It added up to 277 *reales*. Her belongings were so meager that if they confiscated anything for payment, "she would be left naked." They decided to return everything and to allow her to pay off the bill a little at a time, as she was able (73r-74r).

One can only speculate about what happened to Luisa de Dufressi after her release. She was now two years older, twenty-seven, undoubtedly in poor health due to her ordeal, in even worse debt than before, with only the ragged clothes on her back to wear and her medal of the Virgin of Guadalupe to cling to. Although she had been absolved and would not have to wear the infamous San Benito in public humiliation, she would be ostracized by the elements of society that she knew. How could she overcome the blot on her reputation? Would she end her days in the debtors' prison with others who had no family to support them emotionally or financially? Also, the Inquisition could reopen a case at any time and use previous evidence against a person; therefore, her unusual acquittal was not a guarantee that she would not be reimprisoned. Perhaps, upon her release, she went straight to Padre Bocanegra for confession and communion, and he gave her immediate aid and urged her also to go see Manuela de Orio, who had spoken kindly of her. Perhaps they were able to help her regain her health, give her some clothes, help her get back her two-year-old, and leave the port of Veracruz on a ship to Havana. I think that her ebullient personality would have returned in Cuba's atmosphere and she would have reunited with her other children. This time, though, one would hope that she remained in the

household of a prominent Cuban, and stayed away from entrepreneurial endeavors and get-rich-quick ideas.

If she remained in Mexico, she would have been in peril. The atmosphere for the French would become decidedly worse for, within two months of Luisa's release, the fall of the Bastille frightened the Spanish elite. In 1793, after the beheading of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, the situation worsened. In Mexico City, resentment against the "Frenchified" atmosphere, that had only been latent before, turned into overt xenophobia after Spain declared war against France. Accusations of conspiracy abounded. In September 1794, a number of Frenchmen and French sympathizers were arrested by the Inquisition, among them Luisa's friend, Dr. Esteban Morel. Held also in cell 22, he did not find the comfort or strength that Luisa, a member of the "weak sex," had found. He committed suicide in February of 1795.