This book is about religious women's contributions to others' salvation in seventeenth and eighteenth century Spanish America and the Philippines, a subject that has been little studied in previous research. In this investigation, special emphasis is put on aspects of the colonial gender relations that have bearing on the intricate relationships between the apostolic and contemplative forms of religious life as presented in colonial texts by and about these women. The majority of them were nuns, who lived a life in enclosure, a fact that in a most concrete way constrained the physical mobility normally seen as a presupposition for apostolic endeavours.

Despite the constrictions of space and agency that were related to their female gender, many women in the Spanish colonial empire, whether nuns or other contemplatives, were said to have functions in the missionary enterprise. As a consequence of their love of God and neighbour, they felt a vocation for missionary work, they prayed and suffered for the salvation of others, they taught and counselled people who came to them with their religious and moral queries, and some claimed that they were transported in spirit to the mission frontiers where they carried out similar work as the male missionaries, albeit in a supernatural way.

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