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Marriage, Legitimacy, and Intersectional Identities in the Sixteenth-Century Spanish Empire

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Marriage, Legitimacy, and Intersectional Identities in the Sixteenth-Century Spanish Empire

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General Introduction

Historian Magnus Mörner once memorably claimed that, “in a way, the Spanish Conquest of the Americas was a conquest of women.”¹ While he is not exactly wrong, he also is not exactly right. Such a blanket statement erases the complexity of women’s lives and fails to recognize that not all women experienced the conquest in the same way. The Spanish Empire was one of the most extensive global empires in the history of the world. With a foothold in every inhabited continent, this empire had a tremendous impact on the linguistic, economic, religious, and political histories of much of the globe. Yet narratives of the Spanish Empire, and its inception in the sixteenth century in particular, are prone to overgeneralization. Androcentric views of the conquest only focus on the actions of a few influential men, ignoring women entirely, while Eurocentric views ignore the agency and activity of indigenous peoples. This project seeks to use the lives of individual women caught in the tumult of the conquest not only to recognize and gain a greater understanding of their lives and struggles, but also to (re)produce a part of history that has been forgotten and ignored.

Part of the greatest struggle in working with women’s history is the dearth of existing first-hand information. Beyond the material problem of the preservation of written and physical sources over the course of five centuries, dominant cultural values signify what specific information is even considered worthy of recording in the first place. Women are frequently not considered worthy. Not to mention, social strictures on

¹ Magnus Mörner, "The Conquest of Women," in *People and Issues in Latin American History: The Colonial Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Lewis Hanke and Jane M. Rausch (New York: M. Wiener Publishing, 1993), 116.

education have given different people varying levels of access to education and the ability to write and record their own worlds. Women thus appear less in the written record, both because of a general devaluing of women's work, and higher levels of illiteracy and poverty than their male counterparts. How then does one derive a 'truthful' history of women out of sources written by men, on entirely different topics?

The partial solution chosen by this author is to look at women's lives where they are most often recorded—in their interactions with men. In particular, I use the always evolving and constantly ambiguous institution of marriage as the common thread throughout all three of my chapters. I examine marriage as it was both discursively produced and actually lived, both in Spain and in the Americas. Marriage is one of the central institutions present in the lives of sixteenth-century women, and yet this seemingly straightforward arrangement is riddled with contradictions and incoherencies. I show how the ability of an individual to marry well depended not only on the dominant discourse (i.e. Catholicism or Aztec/Inca/Spanish laws), but also on local traditions and the particular identity of an individual themselves.

Although a deeper analysis of all of these contrasting norms can be found in the body of this project, a brief overview of main themes relating to marriage is useful here. For example, norms in the Catholic church changed greatly over the course of the century, and practice followed more slowly. Official church doctrine before the Council of Trent ended in 1563, held that individuals could be married with no more than a mutual promise and sexual consummation of their bond. Spousal abandonment, bigamy, and general confusion prompted the Church to institute new standards in which

individuals had to be married in front a priest who would approve this new bond. While church doctrine changed rapidly, individuals across in the continent, and in Spain in particular, continued local practices of marrying in private for centuries after the official policy change. Additionally, although the Church only considered legitimate children as being born within a Catholic union, relatively privileged people, either with high social standing or with significant economic resources, were able to circumvent this supposedly universal norm.

In the Americas, these traditions looked very different. The similarities between Spanish, Andean, and Mesoamerican marital traditions began and ended with the requirements of a mutual promise and sexual consummation. Compared to Spain, Mesoamerican and Andean marital traditions had different ceremonies, conceptions of gender roles, inheritance laws, child custody practices, and ideals surrounding legitimacy and virginity. One example of this was the Andean and Mesoamerican tradition of polygyny among noblemen in order to form vast familial networks that allowed for the dispersal of power. Still, even amongst the Andean and Mesoamerican conventions were as different as they were similar. One prime illustration of this is the variant descent traditions. While those in Spain considered children the property of the father, Mesoamericans thought of children as the equal descendants of both the mother and father, and Andeans conceived of women descending from lines of women and men from lines of men. These are just a few examples of the different marriage traditions that had a huge impact on the lives of women (and men) in the first moments of conquest.

Above all, these differences demonstrate that any discussion of marriage is incomplete without a contextual analysis of the interactions between ideology, practice, and intersectional identities.

The central theoretical framework that makes my work possible is the theory of intersectionality as proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw.² Intersectionality claims that individuals are always experiencing the world through all of their identities which interact simultaneously. Rather than being able to neatly separate individuals out by their social categories, such as socioeconomic class, race, gender, sexuality, education status, and religion, intersectionality theory looks at the interplay of multiple concurrent identities in the same person. In this way, intersectionality is more than adding more identity labels to individuals, but instead considers the ways in which multiple identities occur simultaneously and co-constitute each other. For example, the lives of indigenous women cannot be (de)constructed using either gender or race theories, but instead must be viewed through a framework that is simultaneously racialized and gendered.

Using intersectionality as a lens through which historical lives can be evaluated helps avoid over simplistic or essentializing narratives that fail to acknowledge and account for the complexity of real individuals. It allows us to pick apart categories such as ‘women,’ clarifying which particular women did what, when, and where. Intersectionality also allows us to recognize the messiness that, while omnipresent in real lives, is often ordered and organized in the historical narrative. Recognizing these

² Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299.

contradictions and incoherencies allows a certain amount of the humanity of historical subjects to be illuminated and recovered.

The sixteenth century is a time period that lends itself particularly well to deconstructions of seemingly ‘natural’ norms and norm production. The 1500s were a time of intense expansion for the Spanish Empire with the fall of the Aztec Empire in the early 1520s, followed closely by the conquest of Peru, and the Inca Empire, in the 1530s. This wave of conquest was immediately followed by a wave of Spanish migrants seeking to improve their fortunes in the New World.³ As can be imagined, the amount of intercultural contact that occurred throughout these decades was immense. As Spaniards interacted with numerous indigenous groups, and everyone interacted across class, economic, linguistic, and gendered lines, various ideologies and social conceptions came into direct contact, and sometimes conflict. The turmoil of these first moments gives us a unique glimpse into the norms of both Spanish and indigenous cultures, and the ways in which these norms played out in the lives of real people.

Immediately post-conquest, the Spanish Crown took on the struggle of controlling and administering the land now under their jurisdiction. A fundamental strategy for instituting state control was the effort to populate the Americas. Population efforts generally took place in three distinct phases through the Americas, though the timing and duration of each phase was dependent on a variety of factors. First, Spanish men married indigenous women of high ranking, allowing their new wives’ wealth to raise their own social and economic standing. Then, after the first moments of conquest, indigenous

³ J.H. Elliott, *Spain and its World, 1500-1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 8.

wives were no longer considered an appropriate marital choice, and the *mestiza* daughters of the first indigenous/Spanish unions came to take the place of appropriate life partners. Finally, in the late sixteenth century, a massive influx of Spanish women to the Americas created a kind of *pigmentocracia* (pigmentocracy) that ranked Spanish women the highest on a racial hierarchy of ideal wives. These waves are roughly represented in the three chapters of this thesis.

The first chapter focuses on the legacy of Hernán Cortés's famous interpreter, La Malinche, or Malintzin as she was more respectfully called. Her narrative is controversial and fraught with current moral dilemmas imposed retroactively by both historians and non-scholars alike. Through an analysis of contemporary sources, including the chronicle by conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo, the annals of Nahua scholar Chimalpahin, and the pictorial representation of the conquest as illustrated by the Tlaxcalan people, I seek to demythologize Malintzin by examining the real choices available to her. Her life trajectory from noblewoman to slave to powerful interpreter and finally to a legitimate wife was possible only because of the ways in which she made her own decisions and acted with agency within the confines of her particular situation. Malintzin's chapter serves as my case study from roughly the decade of the 1520s in what would become the Viceroyalty of New Spain, or modern day Mexico.

The second chapter begins around the same time and continues into the late 1580s, but this time in the Viceroyalty of Peru. Here I offer more of a generation analysis through a discussion of the lives of two Inca *ñustas* (princesses), Quispe Sisa and Cuxirimay, and Quispe Sisa's *mestiza* daughter by Francisco Pizarro, Doña Francisca

Pizarro. This chapter demonstrates the importance of intersecting social identities such as class, race, and legitimacy status that affected not only who these women married, but also how they were treated in their relationships, their ability to take on a mothering role, and the extent of their economic power and independence. I argue that each woman actively exercised agency within the limitations set for them based on their gender, race, and class status. Relying more on secondary scholarly sources, this chapter presents a different reading and a contextualized in-depth analysis of the lives of these three particular women.

In the third and final chapter, I take a slightly different tack to look at transatlantic Spanish marriages. My primary source is eight letters from the mid to late 1500s, sent from Spanish emigrants in the Americas to their loved ones back home. By reading across the letters, common concerns and discourses regarding marriage arise correlating to the identity of the letter writer, such as their gender, social status, economic power, and the gender and position of the letter recipient as well. In this way, it is possible to see how the intersections of several different identities inform and are informed by both dominant norms and the divergent practices of lived experiences.

These three chapters, all taken together, represent distinct but related snapshots of a messy, complicated, and developing empire. They challenge common monolithic conceptions of indigenous women's experiences, migrant narratives, and understandings of marriage as an institution and a practice. Above all, the lives of these women (and men) remind us of the complexity of human interactions and the danger inherent in trying to generalize or compartmentalize real human lives.

A Relevant Timeline of the Conquest of the Aztec Empire

- 1428- The Mexica Triple Alliance forms the Aztec Empire
- 1502- Moctezuma II becomes emperor
- 1502-1505- Malintzin is born
- 1510- Malintzin is enslaved by the Chontal Maya
- 1519- Hernán Cortés lands in Yucatán; Malintzin is given to Cortés by the Maya
- 1520- Cortés and his allies are defeated in *La Noche Triste*, the Sad Night
- 1520- Moctezuma II is killed
- 1521- Tenochtitlan falls to Cortés and his indigenous allies
- 1522- Don Martín is born
- 1524- Malintzin and Juan Jaramillo are married
- 1526- Doña María is born
- 1528- Cortés takes Martín back to Spain
- 1528/1529- Malintzin dies
- 1552- Tlaxcalans create the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*

An Interpreter Re-interpreted: The Life and Legacy of Malintzin Tenepal

Introduction

One can hardly touch on discussions of honor and legitimacy in the sixteenth century without talking about Malintzin, most commonly known as La Malinche. Malintzin was a young Nahua woman who is most famously known for interpreting between Hernán Cortés and the Aztec king Moctezuma II. Given to Cortés as a slave around 1519, Malintzin acted not only as linguistic interpreter, but also as a cultural translator and an ambitious agent whose actions at key moments significantly impacted the trajectory of the Spanish conquest. Malintzin is typically depicted at one of the poles of the virgin/whore dichotomy where she represents either the sanctified maternal figure or the condemned woman of loose morals. She is either portrayed as “the Great Mother,” of the modern Mexican nation or as a “lustful, conniving traitor [who]... let her people down.”⁴

Malintzin’s story has been told, retold, politicized, twisted, manipulated to fit various agendas, and yet still is glossed over or erased in general narratives. Her history has gone through so many iterations and rewritings of the “truth” that she has often become a mythic or metaphoric figure, entirely divorced from the life she once led. More often than not she has been evaluated by strict modern standards, rather than contextualized by the material realities of the world she took part in. This is most clear in her interactions with the men in her life. Her interactions with them have lead various

⁴ Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature from History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 9; Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 2-3.

historians and cultural commentators to declare her a traitor, a seductress, *la chingada* (the duped one), a hapless victim, and a symbol for every indigenous woman caught up in the tumult of the conquest.

Of course, not all historians have let this negative legacy remain the only narrative of her life. Camilla Townsend's book *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* is one such essential work that attempts to sift through the limited sources remaining sixteenth-century sources in order to explore and understand the possibilities of Malintzin's life. She seeks to "humanize her" so that she, and other indigenous women, can be seen "as the real people they once were."⁵ Townsends' groundbreaking work serves as a model and jumping-off point for this chapter, which attempts to demythologize Malintzin by examining the real material choices and opportunities that were available to her. In doing so, I seek to illuminate her actions as she could have perceived them, acknowledging her complex personhood that defies a simple victim/agent binary.

Contrasting Marital Conventions

In order to discuss any group of people, indigenous or otherwise, it is first important to clarify terminology and word use. In discussing the indigenous peoples of what would become the viceroyalty of New Spain and, later, modern Mexico, there are several different terms available to us. I chose to use Mesoamerican to describe broad groups of indigenous people within the larger geographic region, Mexica to discuss the residents of the dominant Aztec Empire, and Nahuatl to describe the largely Nahuatl-

⁵ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 4-5.

speaking population. The term Nahua has, in more recent scholarship, been used by academics to “describe the bulk of the indigenous peoples of central Mexico at the time of the Spanish conquest.”⁶ I find this to be the most appropriate term in this context because Malintzin herself was a native Nahuatl speaker and her experiences, not the machinations of kings and royalty, is the central focus of this chapter.

Nahua conceptions of gender roles operated along different lines from Spanish traditions. Nahuas society was configured within a particular gender parallel system, rather than a patriarchal hierarchy as did the Spanish. In a gender parallel system, entirely separate hierarchies existed for each gender, both in the public and in the private realm. Just as tasks in the home were divided between genders, in the public sphere noblewomen were in charge of women’s political activities and noblemen controlled other men’s political activities. This meant that women, rather than being confined to a limited private role, had the ability to move and influence the public realm. This freedom of movement, did not, however, indicate a parity between genders.⁷ Nahua women typically were in charge of the types of tasks that were considered valuable, but less prestigious than male-designated tasks. So a Nahua woman might cook for the family and be honored for her labor, but her husband who hunted would receive more recognition and respect within the community. Understanding the nuances of the gender parallel system makes it possible to avoid the pitfalls of romanticizing Nahua society as an

⁶ Peter Herman Sigal, *The Flower and the Scorpion: Sexuality and Ritual in Early Nahua Culture*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), xv-xvi.

⁷ Karen Viera Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 21.

example of utopic gender equality while also not oversimplifying it as yet another example of patriarchal abuse.

One clear similarity between Nahuas and Spaniards was the conception of marriage as a necessary and expected way of life. Considering marriage an important and key practice was one of the only points of agreement between the first Spanish missionaries and their newly converted congregations. For the Nahua, marriage marked the transition out of childhood and adolescence and into adulthood. Individuals typically married in their late teens or early twenties, commencing one of the most important phases in a young person's life. As such, marriages were inaugurated with a formal and intricate ceremony, which was performed equally by both families.⁸ A typical marriage ceremony involved the young bride being counseled by her kinswomen and then physically carried over to the groom's home. At this point, the couple sat together, received advice from various family members, ate food prepared by the women of both families, and finally retired to their shared bedchamber.⁹ The couple was then left alone for four days where they fasted and refrained from bathing and intercourse, proving their dedication to their new relationship, until the end of their isolation period, at which point they consummated their union.¹⁰ All of these steps were necessary for the marriage to be recognized by the community at large.

⁸ Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 150-151.

⁹ Richard F. Townsend, *The Aztecs*, Ancient Peoples and Places, rev. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 172-173.

¹⁰ Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 151.

One of the largest differences between Nahua marriage rites and Spanish traditions was the importance of community involvement. In Nahua traditions, both families had essential roles in the preparation and carrying out of the marriage ceremony. Only the four days of isolation, and the sexual consummation of the marriage itself were private events. In contrast, while Spaniards could and often did celebrate marriages as a community, it was not an essential part of the process. If a couple decided to be marry (prior to the Trent reforms of 1563, to be discussed in depth in the third chapter), they could do so without the participation of any other individual. Shifting from the intricate communal ceremonies to more simple individualistic rites was a significant transition for many indigenous peoples. Several priests during the first century of conquest noticed that their parishioners would get married in the church and then travel to the home of community elders to get re-married, this time in their own traditions.¹¹ Catholic customs were not considered sufficient to replace traditional communal rites, which were still necessary for a union to be perceived as authentic.

Polygyny was another marital aspect that differed from Spanish traditions. While most marriages were monogamous, a nobleman could also take a second spouse who was still “socially recognized and accepted” although “they did not marry with full ceremony.”¹² This distinction is of the utmost importance in the first decades of the conquest. It meant that, while secondary or informal relationships were not condemned, they were also not considered to be a ‘legitimate’ or true marriage unless they had gone

¹¹ Susan Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500-1700* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 203.

¹² Burkhardt, *The Slippery Earth*, 151.

through the full ceremony process and ritual. Even a verbal agreement or long-term physical relationship would not be considered a fully realized marriage without the proper purification and penance rites. By the end of the century, however, missionaries' emphasis on Catholic marriage restrictions made monogamy the only acceptable and accepted type of union for both nobles and commoners alike.¹³

Despite the similarities between Nahua and Spanish traditions, there were some notable differences. While the Spanish believed that children were the primary property of the father alone, the Nahua viewed children "as belonging equally to their mothers and to their fathers."¹⁴ This conception of children as being under the control of both parents is extremely significant. For noble families, it meant that children could inherit from either their mother's or their father's communities. It also meant that a mother had equal rights to her child, particularly after her husband or spouse passed away. Excluding exceptional circumstances, no Nahua woman, pre-Spanish conquest, would have experienced the same separation from their children that numerous indigenous women frequently suffered in the first decades of the conquest.¹⁵

The view of children as shared between their parents also had consequences on the dynastic stage. If a couple originated from different *altepetls*, a type of political and cultural division similar to a city state, their children could potentially become successors in either altepetl.¹⁶ This was also true across gender lines. Both daughters and sons were

¹³ Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture*, 203.

¹⁴ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 17.

¹⁵ The separation of indigenous mothers and their mestizo children will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

¹⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 13.

considered to have the same inherent worth due to their shared genealogy, and so both could potentially continue their family line. Nahua historian Chimalpahin, cites several examples of highly ranked women marrying commoner men and starting a new royal line.¹⁷ In this way women, just like men, could retain their birth status regardless of the social positioning of their spouse. In fact, men could raise their own social status by marrying highly-ranked Nahua women. This was something that was not common in either Andean or Spanish traditions. In both of those contexts, men could gain significant economic power or social connections by marrying elite women, but they would not have their rank change in the same way.

Of course, all the discussion of rank change is only relevant when discussing elite or noble people, who already had different social norms and restrictions than did the everyday person. In fact, these differing norms across class lines were often quite contradictory. For example, both noble men and women abstained from sex until marriage.¹⁸ The importance of genealogy for the elite was such that remaining chaste until marriage was preferable to accidentally producing a child. The shared nature of children meant that any unmarried couple who had a child would either have to negotiate where the child would reside or live together themselves. While this would not be a particular burden for a common family who lived in the same region their entire lives, it could be significantly more complicated for the geographically mobile elite. Additionally, elite marriages served as a strategic connection between different families and altepetls.

¹⁷ Susan Schroeder, "Chimalpahin and why women matter in history," in *Indigenous intellectuals: knowledge, power, and colonial culture in Mexico and the Andes*, ed. Gabriela Romans and Yanna Yannakakis (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 110.

¹⁸ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 29.

An unexpected child might ruin the possibility of political alliances, threatening the stability of a ruling family. The nobility's reasons for abstaining were thus more practical and political than moral or ethical.

Nevertheless, Nahua society, particularly among the common people, did not condemn premarital sex or expressions of sexuality. This is exhibited most clearly in the available vocabulary. Nahuatl itself does not have a word for the term "virgin."¹⁹ The accompanying idea of virginity, with all of its connotations, misogyny, and cultural baggage, would have seemed foreign to the average individual. In fact, common Nahua culture directly opposed celibacy as it was considered "dangerous not to fulfill one's sexual desires."²⁰ They believed that it was physically and psychologically unhealthy to repress one's urges, allowing for the buildup of contamination in the body. Interrupting a sexual act before the intended climax was even thought to be the cause of a multitude of diseases.²¹ When it was necessary to remain chaste, such as in the case of nobility, individuals would have to be married as soon as possible in order to mitigate these possibly dangerous health effects. This is perhaps the area in which the Nahua diverge most strongly from Spanish conceptions of sex and sexual duty, and it would have profound effects on the lives of individuals, particularly women, during the first moments of the conquest.

Catholic officials, priests, friars, and missionaries in particular had a difficult time attempting to impose their ideals of the perfect marriage on Nahua communities in the

¹⁹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 27.

²⁰ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 28.

²¹ Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 152.

first decades of colonization. In truth, Catholic officials themselves often had a hard time agreeing on the exact role that sex should play in an ideal marriage. While some earlier theologians “held that sexual intercourse was always sinful, even in marriage” others claimed that a very particular and limited type of sex could indeed be a positive and even loving event.²² The only acceptable sexual expression according the Church was thus “vaginal intercourse by a married couple,” who were implicitly heterosexual.²³ Priests in the New World considered even this restricted manifestation of sexuality as secondary in piety to lifelong celibacy as a priest or a nun, options that were unavailable to indigenous peoples. In fact, most indigenous people were encouraged to marry early because they were considered to be “errant but basically good Indian children” who were “incapable of celibacy” and thus had to be guarded by the morally superior missionaries.²⁴ It is clear where the new emphasis on celibacy, along with the concept of virginity as key, would have grated against indigenous beliefs.

Many Spaniards, particularly those of the lower classes who were not a part of the priesthood, had been raised in these ideals and yet still struggled with their restrictive nature. Thus in the first moments of conquest, the cultural interplay was not merely between the dichotomy of indigenous versus Spanish. Instead a much more complicated web of Spanish missionaries, nobles, and peasants, all interacted with indigenous

²² Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 72.

²³ Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 152-155. The Catholic church’s stance on homosexuality has not always been an attitude of straightforward condemnation, but instead has evolved throughout the middle ages in a general trend of increasing intolerance. By the early fifteen hundreds, this intolerance was widely accepted as official church doctrine. For more information, see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

²⁴ Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth*, 159.

religious officials, nobles, peasants, and slaves. This complicated exchange resulted not only in the actions of these particular historical figures, but also the formation of particular kinds of narratives. Nowhere is this more evident than in the life, narrative(s), and many names of Malintzin.

Malintzin/Malinche/Doña Marina

Naming is an inherently political act. For Malintzin, there have been multiple iterations and reiterations of her name used by different peoples at different times. Although her birth name is unknown, most of the reconfigurations of her aliases were based around her baptismal name, Marina, to which the title “doña” was eventually added. Marina was unpronounceable in Nahuatl due to the absence of the “r” sound, so she became “Malina” to Nahuatl speakers. They then added the honorific ending “-tzin” to form the name “Malintzin,” which was eventually substituted for the more formal “-tze” ending. When Nahuatl speakers said “Malintze,” the Spanish heard “Malinche,” to which they attached the article “la” meaning “the.”²⁵ So she was alternatively Doña Marina, Malina, Malintzin, Malintze, and La Malinche. Each name came from her interactions with a specific group of people and is loaded with expectations and intentions. In choosing to use Malintzin as the primary name in this paper, I hope to privilege the terminology used by the indigenous groups who interacted with, and honored her. Lacking the knowledge of what she called herself, I choose to highlight the way other indigenous groups saw and respected her, rather than the ways in which the Spaniards attempted to reform her.

²⁵ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 12, 55.

Malintzin was born sometime between 1502 and 1505 in the *altepetl* of Coatzacoalcos, which is located in the modern Mexican state of Veracruz, along the Gulf of Mexico.²⁶ By 1510 she was a slave of the Maya, where she learned to speak both Chontal and Yucatan Maya fluently in addition to her native Nahuatl. Slavery itself was not an institution that was viewed identically throughout the Aztec empire. In Nahua culture, where Malintzin came from, there was a clear stigma attached to being a slave. People who were sold away by family members, or others from the *altepetl* were assumed to be unwanted or considered disposable. Individuals could also sell themselves into slavery in times of famine or natural disaster, with the assumption that they would later be able to buy back their freedom.²⁷ Women who had no option but to sell themselves into slavery “were especially liable to be accused of laziness, a terrible insult for anyone of the female sex.”²⁸ This would have been Malintzin’s cultural perception of slavery as she was sold from her *altepetl* to that of the Maya.

Maya conceptions of slavery were not terribly different from Nahua ideals. Slaves were considered to be of the lowest class, but still did much of the same work as Maya women themselves. Slave women assisted with domestic tasks, above all with the time consuming process of producing cotton. One key difference between Nahua and Maya gender relations was the perception of female sexuality. The Maya viewed female sexuality as more of a threat and accordingly relationships across genders were more fraught. This resulted in increased policing of virginity and female chastity until

²⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 13.

²⁷ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 19-23.

²⁸ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 19.

marriage. The increase in monitoring of all free women, including common women, meant that slave women were often the only sexual partners available to unmarried men.²⁹ Malintzin undoubtedly felt the real consequences of this difference at a young age. It must have seemed extraordinarily unfair to her that she had been not only reduced from freewoman to slave, but was also given to a society more likely to demand sex from her. It thus is completely unsurprising that, when given the chance, she would try to improve her lot in whatever manner possible.

How Malintzin came to be a slave to the Maya is still a matter of some debate. As Malintzin never wrote anything down herself, we have to rely on several of her contemporaries for information about her life. Unfortunately, these contemporaries seldom agree with one another. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, conquistador and one of Cortés's foot soldiers, relates an origin story for Malintzin that is distinct from many of the others. It is worth noting that Díaz del Castillo painted a largely positive image of his beloved Doña Marina. In particular, he takes pains to ensure that the story of her birth and childhood is painted in the most positive light possible. He claims that "she was born a ruler over a people and country," which would indicate that she was nobility at least at some level. Unfortunately for Malintzin, "her father died when she was very young, and her mother married another young cazique. By him she had a son... to whom, after their death, they designed to leave their territories."³⁰ If all these territories had been originally

²⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 24-28.

³⁰ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Vol 1 (of 2) Written by Himself Containing a True and Full Account of the Discovery and Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, trans. John Ingram Lockhart (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1844), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32474/32474-h/32474-h.htm#Page_83, 84.

the new husband's, or even a combination of the mother's and her new husband's territories, there would have been no issue listing their son as inheritor of the properties. If, however, some of the territories, or indeed all of them, had been property of Malintzin's late father, this plan would not have been feasible. The Nahuatl conception of children belonging equally to both parents extended to inheritance as well.³¹ Therefore, Malintzin, rather than her half-brother, would have been the actual heir of any property that had once been her father's. In order to take care of this problem, Malintzin's mother arranged that her daughter be "conveyed secretly during the night-time to an Indian family in Xicalango, they spreading the rumor she had died."³² The subtext here was that in giving Malintzin over to another altepetl, they were in fact trading her into slavery.

The similarities between Díaz del Castillo's account of her past and the Biblical story of Joseph are stunningly clear. Díaz del Castillo even later recounts that Malintzin returned home with Cortés after the conquest and forgave her mother and brother for betraying her, just as Joseph forgave his ten half-brothers for selling him into slavery. The parallels are too close to be coincidence, and several historians have speculated that Díaz del Castillo was trying to make Malintzin a more sympathetic and acceptable figure to people back in Spain.³³ Given how heavily the Spanish relied on her for interpreting and translating, it would have been necessary to make her seem as trustworthy and honorable as possible. He probably hoped that some of the less 'respectable' aspects of

³¹ Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture*, 93.

³² Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 84.

³³ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature from History to Myth*, 30.

her character, such as her indigeneity and slave status, would be overlooked because of her clear moral superiority, articulated along Catholic values.³⁴

In fact, it is likely that Malintzin herself planted at least part of this particular narrative. After Díaz del Castillo relates the story of her life pre-slavery, he notes that “the whole affair reminds one of the history of Joseph and his brethren in Egypt.”³⁵ While he may simply be making the Biblical connection explicit for the reader, he does seem to be remarking with some surprise at how closely the life of his beloved Doña Marina matched up with a famous Biblical figure. At the same time that she came to know Díaz del Castillo better, Malintzin was also busy learning about Catholic traditions and mythology. Undoubtedly this story of a young person unfairly forced into slavery resonated with her personal experiences, and would have been an excellent way for her to represent her own story in a more positive light. Malintzin was not unintelligent, and she would have understood the value inherent in connecting her own story and image with icons of her new owner’s Catholic mythology.

Regardless of her contributions to this particular narrative, at least parts of the story can be seriously discredited. Camilla Townsend notes that it is incredibly unlikely that a primary wife, as Díaz del Castillo claimed Malintzin’s mother was, would have sold her own daughter.³⁶ There would have been no benefit for her to do so, and such an action would have in fact gone against traditional Nahua inheritance practices. Perhaps Díaz del Castillo was thinking in terms of the Spanish desire to consolidate power and

³⁴ Fernanda Núñez Becerra, *La Malinche: de la historia al mito* (México, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1996), 38.

³⁵ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 85.

³⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 23.

property, rather than the more common indigenous practice of communities, not individuals, being the center of influence.³⁷ As long as inheritance remained in the altepetl, it is unlikely that Malintzin's mother would have been opposed to each of her children receiving some of the inheritance. If Díaz del Castillo's account is at least partially false then, what other possibilities existed for Malintzin's present condition as a slave?

One possible alternative story is put forth by Francisco López de Gómara in his *Historia de las Indias y Conquista de México* (History of the Indies and Conquest of Mexico). López de Gómara served for a time as Cortés's priest and "can be considered his biographer."³⁸ This volume focused on the whole of Cortés's life, and his conquest of New Spain in particular. Interestingly, López de Gómara's book, published in 1552, fell into the hands of Chimalpahin, a Nahuatl historian. Chimalpahin was born around 1579 and did most of his historical writing in the early seventeenth century. In particular, he tended to focus on epic stories of ancient Mexico. He read and wrote in Nahuatl, Spanish, and Latin, which gave him access to a wide range of oral and written sources. When he received access to López de Gómara's account, however, he decided to do something different. He made a copy of the tome, adding, deleting, and correcting the information in the original text to craft a story that he felt was more accurate.³⁹ Recently, four scholars did an in-depth comparison of the two texts, marking in bold where Chimalpahin added

³⁷ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 58.

³⁸ Susan Schroeder, "Introduction I. The History of Chimalpahin's 'Conquista' Manuscript." to *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian's Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara's La Conquista de México*, by Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón and Francisco López de Gómara, ed. trans. Susan Schroeder et al. Series Chimalpahin. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 3.

³⁹ Schroeder, "The History of Chimalpahin's 'Conquista' Manuscript," 4.

information and putting deleted phrases inside brackets.⁴⁰ This rich volume allows both for an analysis of López de Gómara's narrative, but also Chimalpahin's own analysis and correction of that narrative.

When it comes to Malintzin's origin story, Chimalpahin chose not to correct any of López de Gómara's original text. We can thus assume that he either believed the passage to be entirely truthful, or had no additional information to add. López de Gómara writes that Malintzin "was the daughter of wealthy parents, who were relatives of the lord of the land where they were staying. When she was a young girl some merchants kidnapped her during a war and sold her."⁴¹

This narrative is also carefully constructed to avoid any particular slight against her honor. Malintzin is once again framed as a noble daughter but this time, instead of being betrayed by her family, she was stolen away by an unsavory second party. This implies that she was undeserving of the misfortune that befell her as a young, vulnerable, noble lady. Camilla Townsend also casts doubt upon this narrative as "Nahua girls from elite families were not in the habit of wandering alone... where they could be grabbed with impunity by passersby, nor were Aztec merchants known for such thefts."⁴² She posits then that some member of Malintzin's own people must have been complicit in her being given away. If this were true, it would have been a great humiliation to Malintzin, who would have felt ashamed of the perceived rejection by her larger community.

⁴⁰ Schroeder, "The History of Chimalpahin's "Conquista" Manuscript," 10.

⁴¹ Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, and Francisco López de Gómara, *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahua Historian's Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara's La Conquista de México*, ed. trans. Susan Schroeder et al. Series Chimalpahin. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 100.

⁴²Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 22.

Without the connection to an honorable Biblical figure, she may have preferred the narrative of being stolen away to that of being rejected.

Regardless of the exact details of Malintzin's childhood and transition into slavery, the ways in which her narrative was constructed by the men who were her contemporaries gives us important information about her life. Nearly every chronicler or conquistador who included Malintzin by name in their documentation considered her a noble lady. In this aspect, they were most likely correct. Malintzin was able to interpret *tepcillahtolli*, the convoluted lordly language, between Cortés and Moctezuma II.⁴³ She could only have learned this language if she had been raised in a noble household, and in close and constant proximity with the most influential and powerful men of that region. It is doubtful, however, that Díaz del Castillo or López de Gómara were aware of her adeptness with this particular language.

What then was the benefit for them to highlight her legitimacy? Beyond making her appear more trustworthy, it is possible that these men were playing within a politics of legitimacy. Unlike Spanish traditions, no Mesoamerican child was considered illegitimate in the European sense. Instead, children had different statuses and potentials based on the particular status of their parents.⁴⁴ For the Spaniards, however, Malintzin would have to be legitimate by their standards (in other words, born within a licit marriage) in order to be respectable. Without knowing her precise parentage, and thus her own social status, Malintzin's noble blood acted as a substitute for the knowledge of her

⁴³Matthew Restall, "The Lost Words of La Malinche: The Myth of Mis(Communication)," in *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 98.

⁴⁴Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 21.

parent's marital status. By ignoring her legitimacy entirely in exchange for a repetition of information regarding her nobility, Díaz del Castillo and López de Gómara could have been implying that her nobility was nearly synonymous with legitimacy. In many ways it was. While the direct definition of legitimacy had nothing to do with nobility, status frequently made it possible to buy legitimation as would occur later in Malintzin's own life with her firstborn son.

They also could have considered her a noble lady by her own virtues. In Díaz del Castillo's narrative, she appears as a "very fine woman" as well as "uncommonly shrewd."⁴⁵ Her usefulness to Spanish and indigenous men alike would have impressed the fairer of them and earned their respect. Unfortunately for Malintzin, however, this pseudo-legitimacy or additional respect might have encouraged the men in her life to justify her influence among them, and may have further helped her prove her usefulness in the conquest, but it did nothing to help free her from her current status as a slave. Only marrying, either as a primary or secondary wife, or buying her own freedom would achieve that end.

Malintzin lived some ten or so years with the Maya until, in 1519, she was yet again given away. This time she, along with nineteen other young women, were gifted to Cortés as a kind of peace offering by the Maya. At this point, Cortés did not take any particular interest in Malintzin, nor in any of the other women in the group. Instead, he divvied up the new slaves among the leading men in his expedition. Malintzin herself was given to Alonso Hernández de Puertocarrero, cousin to an earl and thus the highest

⁴⁵ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 80, 251.

ranking man on the expedition.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, Cortés had wanted to impress Hernández de Puertocarrero as he would be most influential in raising Cortés's status back on the peninsula. Díaz del Castillo noted that Malintzin was given to Hernández de Puertocarrero because she "was the prettiest, the most active and lively of the number."⁴⁷ Whatever the reason, Malintzin remained with the Spanish nobleman for the next several months at least.

What her time with Hernández de Puertocarrero was like cannot be known. None of the chroniclers or conquistadors of the time considered his treatment of her to be of any interest. Indeed, it was unlikely that he himself spent much time or energy contemplating Malintzin and her life. After all, she was his slave, and men in his social position hardly spent a good deal of time worrying about the well-being and happiness of their property, especially when said slave could not (yet) speak the same language. In fact, Hernández de Puertocarrero had a reputation for misusing and abandoning even respectable Spanish ladies.⁴⁸ While we have no record of his abuse or mistreatment of Malintzin, it is hard to imagine that he was a particularly kind or generous master either way. It would also be naïve to assume that he did not rape her. Until Malintzin learned Spanish and proved herself useful in communication, she would have had few skills that were indispensable to the conquistadors. Providing sex and physical companionship would have been one of her primary duties, at least initially.

⁴⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 37.

⁴⁷ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 82.

⁴⁸ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 41.

The sexual assaults perpetrated against indigenous women in the first moments of conquest were intense and pervasive. Ignoring such a reality allows contemporary and current narratives to pretend that Malintzin, and other indigenous women like her, acted entirely of their own volition and without coercion. It also allows conquistadors like Díaz del Castillo to ignore any issues of virginity or chastity that normally would be used to evaluate the worth of young women. In fact, Malintzin in particular was vulnerable to sexual assault in a variety of ways. As had been previously mentioned, the Maya would have had little reason to leave her alone, and the same was true of the Spanish. She was once again the slave of a new people with whom she did not share either a culture or language. Her enslavement to the Spaniards with its accompanying sexual assault and linguistic challenges must have felt uncomfortably familiar. It is thus unsurprising that she worked hard to learn Spanish and prove herself invaluable to the expedition. She likely would have had no desire to have to go through another huge life upheaval with all the risks that entailed.

Within the year, Malintzin had firmly established herself as a key interpreter to the Spanish. The Spanish had their own interpreter, Jerónimo de Aguilar, who could interpret between Spanish and Maya, but not into Nahuatl, which was the key language for communicating at the highest level, with Moctezuma II himself. Malintzin must have decided that this was her moment to prove her value as she stepped forward to interpret between Nahuatl and Maya. Now, rather than simply being another pretty indigenous slave woman, she was the key to communication and all of the survival necessities that came along with it. Eventually, she learned Spanish as well, making de Aguilar a

superfluous addition to their group and earning herself a lifelong enemy.⁴⁹ Not long after she first stepped forward to interpret with de Aguilar, Cortés recognized her skills and took her back from Hernández de Puertocarrero. As a type of consolation prize, Cortés then gifted the nobleman a young woman, the daughter of a chief, who had been given to Cortés by a Totonac chief with the intention that Cortés would marry her. Unbeknownst to this chief, Cortés was already married within a monogamous system, and his wife Catalina remained waiting for him on the island of Cuba.⁵⁰ This is another example of a pattern that happened repeatedly in the first moments of conquest as indigenous leaders offered their female relatives as wives to conquistadors who then interpreted these unions as “concubinage at best and illicit affairs at worst.”⁵¹ So Hernández de Puertocarrero received a mistress, Cortés gained an interpreter, Malintzin remained a slave, but with increased utility, and the unnamed young noblewoman found herself a concubine or mistress rather than an honorable wife.

More than her status as a slave, Malintzin’s presence as an interpreter was remarked upon by nearly everyone who kept any kind of record of her life. The Tlaxcalans were one such group who focused intently on her role as an interpreter. They were an indigenous group who helped Cortés attack and then occupy Tenochtitlan in 1521. Three decades later in 1552, the Tlaxcalans commissioned the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, a massive piece of linen painted with eighty-eight scenes of Tlaxcala’s history as well as the conquest. This source has been preserved primarily because it was sent to the Spanish

⁴⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 41.

⁵⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 41.

⁵¹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 58.

king in order to ask that further financial assistance and honorable titles be given to these allies of Cortés.⁵² It was then transcribed into lithographs, and from lithographs into books.⁵³ Malintzin was one of the key figures depicted in the images of the *Lienzo*. She appears twenty times in the forty-eight scenes of conquest, and is depicted independently of Cortés four of those times. In every scene in which she appears, she is either acting as an interpreter for Cortés, or is represented alongside Catholic iconography.

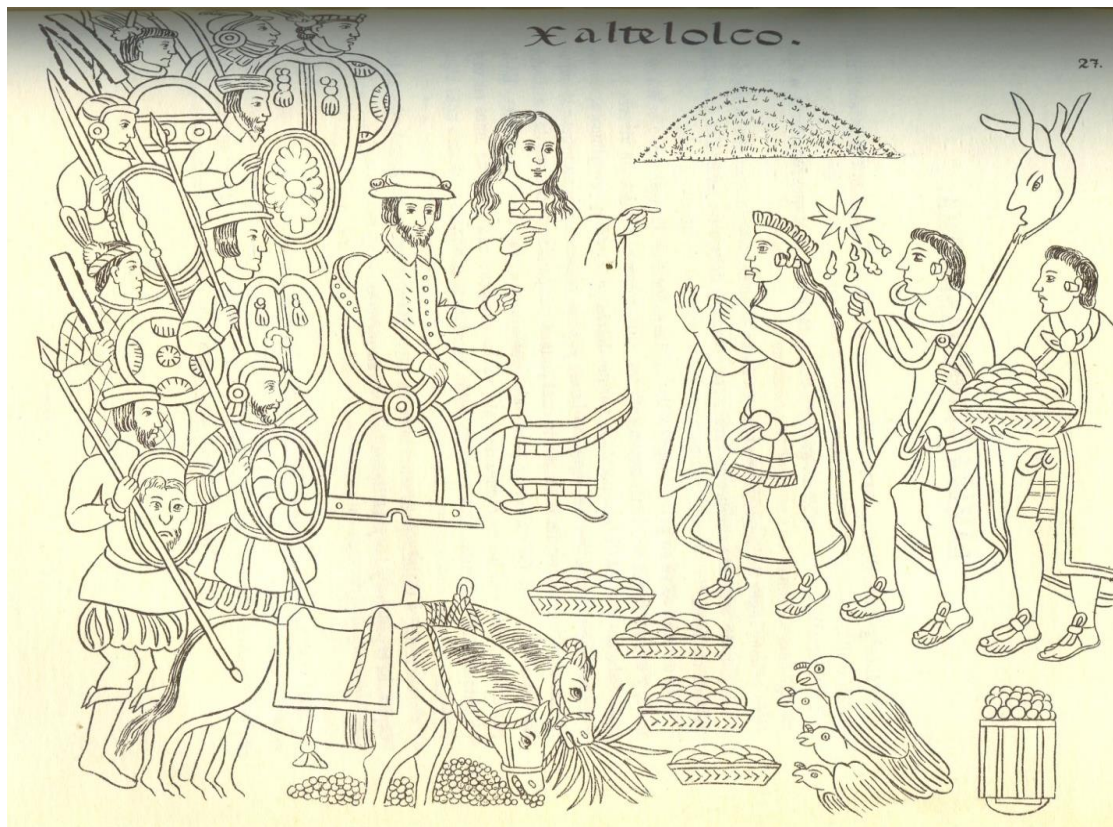


Figure 1. “Xaltelolco” (“Xaltelolco”),
El Lienzo de Tlaxcala (Chavero 1979, Pl. 27)

⁵² Frances Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche,” in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Gail Wood, and Robert Stephen Haskett. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 292; Angela Marie Herren, “Representing and Reinventing Doña Marina: Images from the Florentine Codex and the Lienzo De Tlaxcala,” *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 16 (2000): 160-161.

⁵³ Byron Ellsworth Hamann, “Object, Image, Cleverness: The Lienzo De Tlaxcala,” *Art History* 36, no. 3 (2013): 519.

In one such example, “Xaltelolco” (fig. 1), Malintzin is depicted at Cortés’s side, hand held out in the traditional interpreting pose, as she conveys messages between Cortés and the village Xaltelolco. Malintzin is drawn larger than Cortés himself, looming in the middle of the painting rather than fading into the background. The Tlaxcalans, rather like Díaz del Castillo, López de Gómara, and Chimalpahin, have drawn Malintzin as a noblewoman. In this case, her nobility is indicated by her wearing of the *huipilli*, which was a type of tunic worn over a top. Her particular *huipilli* was drawn in the original *Lienzo* in white and red—the colors of the Tlaxcalan nobility.⁵⁴ Once again, the Tlaxcalans had much to gain by representing her as a noblewoman. This helped justify their actions in talking through her and listening to her commands. They also recognized the power and influence she held as an interpreter. They chose to represent her actions as an interpreter, rather than focus on her status as a slave.

Chimalpahin also chooses to focus more on Malintzin’s interpreter role rather than her slave status. For example, every time López de Gómara refers to Malintzin as simply “Marina” or “Malinche,” he does so without the honorific *doña*. Chimalpahin leaves this as is but chooses to add Tenepal as Malintzin’s second name so that each time she is referred to as “Marina Tenepal” or “Malinche Tenepal.”⁵⁵ The word “Tenepal” is most likely a “corruption of the Nahuatl *tenepil*, ‘somebody’s tongue,’ a likely calque of the Spanish term *lengua*, ‘translator.’”⁵⁶ In this way Chimalpahin is building her role

⁵⁴ Herren, “Representing and Reinventing Doña Marina,” 162.

⁵⁵ David E. Tavárez, “Introduction II. Reclaiming the Conquest: An Assessment of Chimalpahin’s Modifications to *La conquista de México*,” in *Chimalpahin’s Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian’s Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara’s La Conquista de México*, by Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin, Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón and Francisco López de Gómara, ed. trans. Susan Schroeder et al. Series Chimalpahin. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 22-23.

⁵⁶ Tavárez, “Reclaiming the Conquest,” 32n35.

as an interpreter into her very name. He even inserts her a number of times when López de Gómara fails to specify who exactly was interpreting. Part of Chimalpahin's overall goal was to raise the status of his people and their place in history. Malintzin would have been of the utmost importance to him in accomplishing this goal. She was not only an impressive interpreter, she was one who had aided and was favored by the Spanish, who, during Chimalpahin's time, were largely in charge of the area.

When Chimalpahin collated his own annals into what is now called the *Codex Chimalpahin*, he did not fail to mention the effects and efforts of Nahua women throughout history. For him, such inclusion was less about politics and more about logic because, "how could he not acknowledge one half of the history he was writing?"⁵⁷ Among his descriptions of women in all walks of life, Malintzin once again features prominently. Here she is largely referred to her as Malintzin, rather than Marina, and is described as an even more active and influential character. Chimalpahin describes her "issuing directives, questioning rulers, serving as a messenger for Cortés, and seeing to it that things were done as he wished."⁵⁸ He recognizes Malintzin for her behavior and portrays her as an active subject rather than a passive object.

Both Díaz del Castillo and the *Lienzo del Tlaxcala* also recognize moments in which Malintzin made a conscious effort to help the Spaniards. The clearest example of this lies with the story of the town of Cholula, which has often been used to perpetuate

⁵⁷ Schroeder, "Chimalpahin and why women matter in history," 109.

⁵⁸ Schroeder, "Chimalpahin and why women matter in history," 117.

the idea that Malintzin was a traitor to her people.⁵⁹ Díaz del Castillo relays this event as a traditional story of betrayal, double-crossing, and eventual Spanish victory. In his telling, Cortés and the Spaniards were promised safety for the night by the Cholulan people. Malintzin translated the peaceful agreement but had her suspicions about the honesty of the natives. That night, an older woman, who had “taken compassion on the youth and good looks of Doña Marina” pulled her aside and promised to save her from the planned double-crossing of the Cholulans and the carnage that would follow.⁶⁰ The older woman promised Malintzin that she could marry one of her sons, but she, rather than accepting, tricked the woman into disclosing the details of the planned betrayal and relayed these details to the Spaniards. The Europeans were able to use this information to strike preemptively, defeating the Cholulans and escaping relatively unharmed.⁶¹

Díaz del Castillo’s portrayal of this event is significant. It is the only moment in his whole narrative in which we see Malintzin acting entirely of her own volition, and independent of the commands or requests of Cortés—and she does so in defense of Spanish interests. Díaz del Castillo describes Malintzin as “altogether very shrewd” and says that she “artfully concealed” her true thoughts from the native woman.⁶² The picture that he outlines is one of a woman who is intelligent and independent, dangerously so. She acts far beyond the expectations of a person of her station and position. In fact, Malintzin’s actions deviated from that of traditional passive womanhood and could be

⁵⁹ The following description and analysis of the events at Cholula was taken largely from a previous paper written by the author. See Jennifer Brooks, “More than a Woman: Sixteenth Century Representations of La Malinche,” (Final Paper, Science, Empire and Visual Culture, Macalester College, 2014), 10-13.

⁶⁰ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 201.

⁶¹ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 199-204.

⁶² Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 201.

considered extraordinary by Spanish standards.⁶³ In this way, Malintzin's actions could be considered a threat to the larger patriarchal social structure within which the Spaniards operated. This threat was easily mediated, however, by demonstrating that Malintzin's cunning was used for the Spaniard's benefit. Rather than working to betray the Spanish or gain her own power, Malintzin was painted as the ultimate loyal servant; utilizing her brilliance only for the benefit of those who owned her. This picture not only mitigates the power and agency held by the woman herself, it also ignores any benefits she stood to gain by defending the Spaniards.

It is very likely that Malintzin acted, not out of a sense of loyalty, but out of a sense of self-preservation. She knew her position within the Spanish retinue and easily recognized what was expected of her. She did not live a free life but could see routes and paths to an improved social position within a known hierarchy. With regard to the Cholulans, she had no way of knowing if they were being honest with her, nor would she likely have had any desire to be given to another man whom she knew nothing about.⁶⁴ It is thus foolish to read this event as any kind of betrayal. As historian Frances Karttunen notes, "When she was given to Cortes she had no one... to betray. She was not Aztec, not Maya, not "Indian"... That made her dangerous, but it says nothing about her morality."⁶⁵ Malintzin's actions here demonstrate her tenacity and will to survive given the limited options available to her.

⁶³ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 25.

⁶⁴ Frances E. Karttunen, "To the Valley of Mexico: Doña Marina, "La Malinche" (ca. 1500-1527)" in *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 10.

⁶⁵ Karttunen, "Rethinking Malinche," 311.

The *Lienzo* shows a similar understanding of Malintzin's involvement in Cholula. The image entitled "Cholollā" (fig. 2), named after the town, displays the fight perpetrated against the Cholulans by the Spaniards. On the left, Spaniards are invading the temple and killing the holy men while other conquistadors trample the Cholulans under the hooves of their horses. To the right of the scene stands Malintzin passively surveying the carnage. Her hand is again pointed in an interpreting gesture that here signifies her giving direction to the violence that is occurring. This image is unique among those in the *Lienzo* as one of the only places in which Malintzin is placed in a leading role, independent of Cortés, who is conspicuously absent from the image.⁶⁶

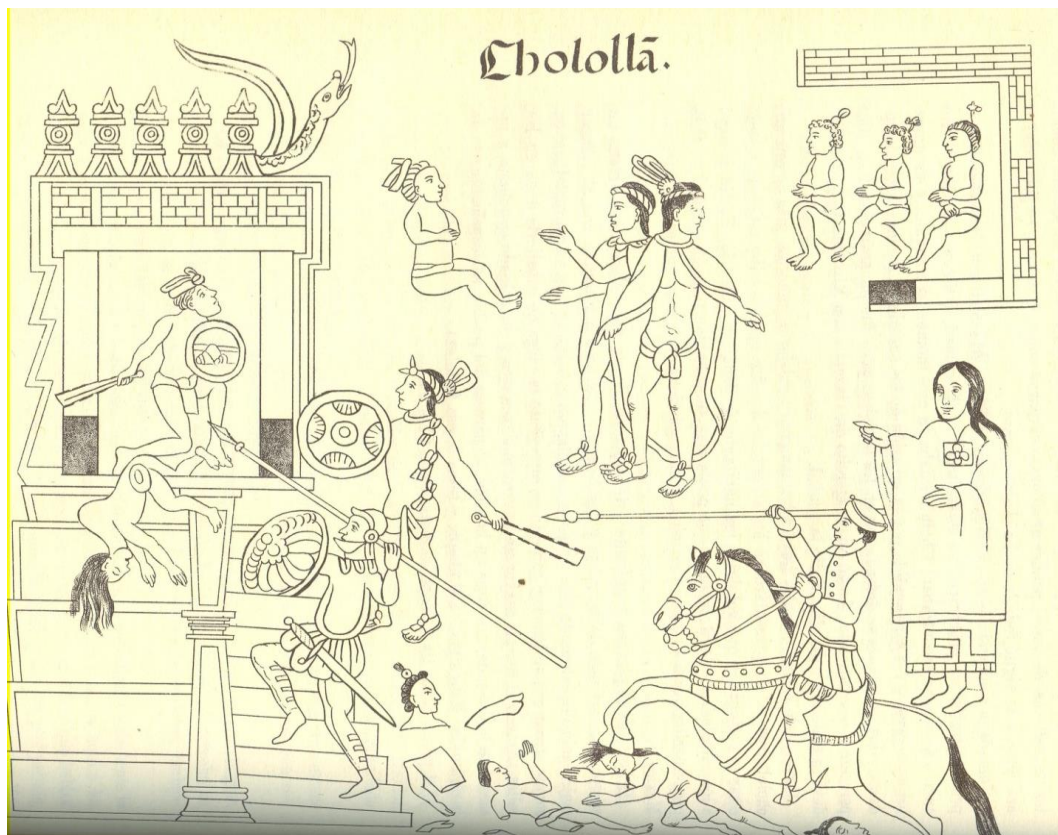


Figure 2. "Cholollā" ("Cholulla"),
El Lienzo de Tlaxcala (Chavero 1979, Pl. 9)

⁶⁶ Herren, "Representing and Reinventing Doña Marina," 174.

Malintzin stands proud and tall in this representation and yet is not given the same amount of agency as was accorded to her in the account by Díaz del Castillo. In crafting this illustration, the Tlaxcalans relayed a slightly different order of events. Rather than extracting the information regarding the Cholulan betrayal through her own shrewdness and cunning, she received her intel from a secondhand source. At the very top of the image there stands two Tlaxcalans, one who is conversing with the Cholulan priest, and another who is relaying the priest's words to Malintzin who then gives the order for the Spanish violence.⁶⁷ By adding this intermediary, the Tlaxcalans are placing themselves in the center of the action and reminding the Crown once again of their presence and significance. They also serve to mitigate the danger of Malintzin's actions. The credit for the slaughter of the Cholulans can thus be transferred from her own cunning to the loyalty and intelligence of the Tlaxcalans who saved the Spaniards from certain defeat.

Unfortunately, the trend of focusing on her interpretive abilities rather than her social status was not a lasting pattern. Cortés himself was one of the individuals who worked to erase her utility from the record. In his letters to the king, Cortés mentions Malintzin a scant two times. He comments offhand that he had a female Indian interpreter and that she traveled everywhere with him "after she had been given me as a present."⁶⁸ In truth, Cortés relied heavily on Malintzin exactly for her interpreting abilities. This is evident in that many of the indigenous peoples with which the two conversed began to

⁶⁷ Alfredo Chavero, *El Lienzo de Tlaxcala: explicación de las láminas*, original ed. *Antigüedades mexicanas: Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, (Mexico City: Secretaría Fomento, 1892; Mexico City: Editorial Cosmos, 1979), 26-27.

⁶⁸ Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, trans. A.R Pagden (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971): 73, 376.

refer to Cortés as “Malinche,” theoretically fusing the two individuals.⁶⁹ His ungratefulness and lack of recognition of her achievements should not come as a particular surprise. Cortés would have seen her as his property. Therefore, although he clearly was able to discern her usefulness, he was not under any obligation to acknowledge the massive impact she had. Still, the fact that history has many times erased her interpretive role in exchange for recognition of her sexual life, is nothing short of further violence perpetrated against her.

Shortly after the fall of Tenochtitlan in 1521, Malintzin had a child with Cortés who was called Don Martín Cortés.⁷⁰ This particular relationship, in addition to events like Cholula, furthers narratives depicting her as a traitor and seductress. The sexual double standard attached to this union is blatant. Cortés is rarely condemned for having sex with the women under his control, while his own slave is criticized for not finding some way to refuse sexual contact, even if such a refusal went against her own best interest. Examining her relationship with Cortés requires a more nuanced understanding of the options available to her, based both on her social position and her and Cortés’s contrasting worldviews.

Malintzin’s position as Cortés’s slave significantly limited her available choices. She did not have the opportunity nor the option to simply leave him or deny him access to her body. Nor did she have good reason to do so. Among the Nahuatl, it was not unheard of for men to choose slave women to be their wives. Although these women

⁶⁹ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 176; Frances E. Karttunen, “To the Valley of Mexico: Doña Marina,” 9.

⁷⁰ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 82.

were never primary wives, they could be married as secondary wives without the accompanying ceremony.⁷¹ It is entirely possible that this was precisely what Malintzin was aiming for. If she knew that Cortés was already married, she would not have found it odd that he would consider another, secondary, wife. In this case, aiding Cortés in any manner he wished could only be to her advantage. She also may have conceived of sex with Cortés as something natural, if not necessarily desirable. Having grown through adolescence and into young adulthood as a slave, being sexually available was probably something she was accustomed to, whether or not it was enjoyable for her.

Cortés would have conceived of the relationship in an entirely different way. Cortés had married his wife, Catalina, under duress but with the official approval of the Church. In the Catholic tradition, there was no such thing as permissible polygamy. Cortés then would not have conceived of his relationship with Malintzin as any kind of legally binding or permanent commitment. Furthermore, he probably did not even consider their relationship to be any type of a union because “sexual relations with slaves were not considered sinful, as the women were deemed bought objects.”⁷² Even the church, progressive clergy withstanding, would not have recognized the relationship as such.

However, while Cortés’s relationship with Malintzin would not have been condemned in and of itself, he was still having sex outside of his wedding bond, which was very much against Church doctrine. His wife, Catalina, certainly knew about the relationship at the very least upon the birth of Don Martín. Whether or not she conceived

⁷¹ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 20.

⁷² Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature from History to Myth*, 25.

of this relationship as adultery, it would not have been a neutral affair for her. Catalina herself had no children, and so Cortés's illegitimate son was now his only heir, displacing Catalina of her inheritance in the case of Cortés's death. As mentioned previously, Cortés even had Martín legitimized by the pope so that he could be his heir if he never conceived any children in wedlock.⁷³ Yet Cortés's gendered identity, his political and social power, and the suspicious death of his wife in 1522, all factored into his sexual relationships being considered of less import than they were for the women in his life.⁷⁴

Malintzin's two contradictory statuses clearly collide within a discussion of her relationship with Cortés. She is simultaneous a maligned but essentially innocent noblewoman and a sexually available slave. For her, these two identities would not have been mutually exclusive. A noblewoman sold into slavery would have experienced immense shame and a drop in status, but not irredeemably. She still had the possibility of marrying as a secondary wife or earning her freedom. For the Spaniards who wrote about her, consolidating what they viewed as two polar opposite identities into one individual required a certain amount of silencing, erasure, or feigned ignorance.

Thus both Díaz del Castillo and López de Gómara, beyond noting the initial instance in which she was "given" to Cortés, never again mention her slave status. From this point on they depict her as a noblewoman, freely helping the Spaniards out of either a sense of piety or out of loyalty to Cortés. They ignore the complexity of her social positioning. It would be a mistake to pretend that she was forced to do everything that she

⁷³ Cortés did indeed later marry another Spanish woman and have multiple legitimate children with her so that Don Martín was replaced as heir. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 151.

⁷⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 136-38.

did with no regard for her own agency. Simultaneously, it is inaccurate to pretend that she did not experience coercion or operate under the confines of slavery. By ignoring this complicated interplay, chroniclers of the conquest were able to gloss over the central contradiction in their depiction of her. Likely, they were not doing so intentionally, but her status as an indigenous female slave made her invisible to a certain extent, or at least ignorable. Fortunately, Malintzin did not rely on Spanish men to improve her life for her, but rather took matters into her own hands.

Malintzin's relationship status did not end as the mistress of Cortés. It was only a few years later, in 1524 or 1525, when she married Juan Jaramillo. There are two different narratives regarding her nuptials. The first story, perpetuated by many contemporary chroniclers is of a marriage that was essentially a drunken mistake. López de Gómara recounts that it was on a trip to present day Honduras where "an inebriated Juan Jaramillo married Marina... [the men] blamed Cortés for allowing it, despite his having had children with her."⁷⁵ Inebriation resulting in marriage, while unlikely, is entirely possible based on understandings of Catholic marriages at the time. If Jaramillo and Malintzin both consented to the union, and especially if others witnessed this promise, and then consummated that promise, they could be married under all the requirements of the Church as it existed in 1524.⁷⁶ It would not have been the elaborate or communal affair of Malintzin's altepetl, but she had been living with Spaniards long enough to understand and take advantage of their marriage traditions. Regardless, it is

⁷⁵ Chimalpahin and López de Gómara, *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian's Rewriting*, 382.

⁷⁶ Allyson M. Poska, *Regulating the People: The Catholic Reformation in Seventeenth-Century Spain*, vol. 5 of *Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 101.

unlikely that their nuptials occurred in such a manner. First, other contemporary accounts contradict it. Díaz del Castillo wrote that after having Cortés's son, Malintzin "then married a cavalier named Juan Xaramillo" without any mention of physical or mental impairment. He also claims, rather strongly that "What I have related is the strict truth, and can swear to it. Gomara's account respecting this is wholly erroneous."⁷⁷ Díaz del Castillo thus directly confronts and contradicts the claims of López de Gómara. In truth, whether or not Jaramillo was drunk when he married Malintzin, she did not marry badly.

Juan Jaramillo had been one of the men in Cortés's original company, and she thus would have known him for a number of years. He was fairly wealthy, with a substantial encomienda and was in the process of solidifying his *hidalgo*, or low nobility status. As Camilla Townsend states, "Malintzin in fact secured a relatively well-placed and useful husband."⁷⁸ The extent to which Malintzin was able to choose her own husband is unknown. If she had picked, however, it is hard to imagine that she would have had the opportunity to unite with a more well-positioned and secure man. What is more, Malintzin came to her marriage with a significant dowry. Cortés had gifted her an encomienda including an altepetl close to her own homeland. Thus, in marrying Jaramillo, Malintzin did not only shed her slave status, she also "left the days of being a vulnerable mistress behind forever and entered the ranks of well-born Spaniards with legal rights."⁷⁹ It is hard to underestimate the huge shift this would have made for her legally, as well as socially. By marrying Jaramillo, she was entering into a whole new

⁷⁷ Díaz del Castillo, *Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 85.

⁷⁸ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 154-155.

⁷⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 155.

level of respectability which she could not have hoped to access before. Now she could own her own dowry, and though women had limited rights, she was still considered a free person. For a woman who had spent around fourteen of her twenty-two odd years as a slave, this marriage, as a first wife no less, must have felt like success.

Unfortunately for Malintzin, marriage did not automatically mean her struggles were over. Like many other indigenous women around the same time, Malintzin was not given the right to raise her own son, Martín. As a Nahua woman, she would have expected that she would be allowed to raise her own child. The Nahua did not separate mothers from their children, regardless of whether the mother was a slave or not. However, Spanish perceptions of children as belonging to the father meant that Malintzin had no right to her own son. Cortés was able to dictate that Don Martín live with Cortés's chosen guardian, whether or not Malintzin was able or willing to care for him. In this case, Martín lived near to his mother, but in the home of "Cortés's cousin by marriage, the licenciado Juan Altamirano."⁸⁰ The separation of indigenous mothers from their mestizo children was all too common in the first decades of the conquest. Racialized and sexualized conceptions of indigenous women as incapable of properly educating their children resulted in the forced, and often painful, separation of natal families.⁸¹ Whether or not Malintzin was surprised by the separation is unknowable. Certainly it went against the traditions she had been raised in, but at this point she had been living with the Spanish for more than six years and probably knew a good deal of their traditions. Still, it was

⁸⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 170-71. Licenciado typically refers either to a discharged soldier or a lawyer.

⁸¹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 82. For a more in-depth discussion on mestizo children's separation from their indigenous mothers, see the following chapter.

another blow to the intrepid indigenous girl who had fought all her life to make the best of her circumstances and persevere. For Malintzin, this forced separation would become permanent when Martín, at age six in 1528, was taken by Cortés back to Spain in order to be officially legitimated by the pope. Although Martín did eventually return back to the Americas, he did so after his mother had already passed, so that the two would never meet again.⁸²

Malintzin's separation from Martín would not be repeated with her second child, Doña María Jaramillo, for various reasons. Doña María was born in 1526 to Malintzin and Jaramillo on their journey back from contemporary Honduras with Cortés.⁸³ Unlike Malintzin, María was born a free and legitimate daughter to a lawfully married couple. She was also *mestiza*, part indigenous and part Spanish, and for women in the first decades of the conquest, this was almost as good as being entirely Spanish in terms of status. A lack of pure Spanish women in the early empire meant that Spanish men lacked a sufficient number of potential partners. Although the first moments of conquest saw a variety of indigenous/Spanish marriages, there was a continual racialized impetus to preserve the *limpieza de sangre*, or pure-bloodedness, of future generations of Spaniards. Mestizas were thus considered the next best option to for Spanish men looking for wives. These women were often raised in the Spanish manner and thus could be considered proper spouses who could continue the appropriate Iberian traditions. Doña María was one such woman. Right from birth, she held a number of social identities that virtually guaranteed that she would have an easier life than her mother.

⁸² Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 171.

⁸³ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 163.

Doña María was also not separated from her mother for the simple fact that Malintzin died in late 1528 or early 1529, a victim of European diseases from which she lacked immunity.⁸⁴ Malintzin would only have been in her mid to late twenties at the time of her death. She died only four short years after her marriage and finally earning her freedom. Despite the huge impact she had on the course of the conquest, and in the lives of individual conquistadors, she was quickly overlooked. Her husband, Jaramillo, remarried within a matter of months to a fifteen-year-old Spanish noblewoman, Doña Beatriz de Andrada. Doña Beatriz and Doña María eventually ended up in court together as “in blatant contempt of Doña María’s rightful inheritance...Jaramillo opted to bequeath her Indian mother’s dowry (encomienda) to his Spanish wife.”⁸⁵ The two ended up splitting the land, in direct contradiction with both indigenous and Spanish inheritance practices.

Doña María’s court case against her stepmother is one of the only reasons that historians today know anything about the end of Malintzin’s life. If Jaramillo had been fairer in his will, or Doña María less tenacious in chasing her rightful inheritance, we would know nothing at all. It seems to be a poor kind of irony that such an active, influential, and intelligent woman died so quietly and with little fanfare. Yet it seems to be indicative of the type of life she lived; simultaneously considered the most essential member of the conquest and the most disposable and ignored.

⁸⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 171.

⁸⁵ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 81-82.

Conclusions

Malintzin was depicted and described by contemporary male historians and chroniclers in terms that most benefitted them. She was alternatively noble, beautiful, witty, helpful, intelligent, useful, property, manipulative, and a nonentity. Who she actually was is somewhat more complicated than that. She was a motivated and ambitious woman who operated within the confines of her captivity and her own understanding of her positionality in relation to other indigenous groups. As an influential interpreter, she was more than the symbolic “bridge... between at least three cultures.”⁸⁶ She was an intelligent individual who chose to insert herself into situations that would best secure a steady future for herself and her children. In order to do so, she had to prove herself valuable to the Spanish, prove her own Catholic religiosity, sidle around discussions of legitimacy and virginity, give up the rights to her son, and ultimately marry a Catholic man in the traditional Spanish way. Her ability to adapt, not only to the Spanish language, but also to Spanish customs and conceptions, allowed her to thrive and then flourish in a time of great turmoil and change. That she survived decades of enslavement is an impressive feat; that she died by disease mere years after gaining a legitimate status, a tragedy.

Malintzin was a real woman whose life had real materiality and limitations. Where Malintzin has been continually dragged into the present in order to fulfill modern needs, many other indigenous women have hardly been remembered at all. Thousands of miles from Malintzin’s homeland, in the decade following her death, other indigenous

⁸⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 3.

women were encountering similar ideological and material struggles in the Inca Empire. It is to several of their stories, so similar and yet so vastly different from Malintzin's, that we now turn.

A Relevant Timeline of the Conquest of Peru

- ~1518- Quispe Sisa is born
- ~1522- Cuxirimay is born
- 1528- Francisco Pizarro first lands in the Americas
- 1528- Huayna Capac dies, sparking a fratricidal war amongst his sons for his position
- 1532- Atahualpa orders the execution of his half-brother Huascar; becomes Inca
- 1532- Cuxirimay ceremonially marries Atahualpa
- 1533- Francisco Pizarro orders the execution of Atahualpa; installs nobleman Manco Inca as a puppet ruler
- 1534- Rebellions lead by Manco Inca begin to cause serious unrest in the colonies
- 1534- Doña Francisca Pizarro Yupanqui is born
- 1538- Hernando Pizarro participates in the killing of Diego de Almagro; returns to Spain where he is then imprisoned
- 1538- Quispe Sisa marries Francisco de Ampuero
- 1538- Cuxirimay and Francisco Pizarro start their relationship
- 1541- Francisco Pizarro is killed by Diego de Almagro's supporters
- 1542- Crown institutes the *Leyes Nuevas*, New Laws, crippling the encomienda system
- 1544- Manco Inca is killed by Spaniards
- 1544- Cuxirimay marries Juan de Betanzos
- 1548- Gonzalo Pizarro leads an uprising against new reforms limiting the power of encomenderos; is killed
- 1551- Francisca Pizarro is exiled to Spain
- 1552- Francisca Pizarro marries Hernando Pizarro
- 1581- Francisca Pizarro marries Pedro Arias Portocarrero

The Power of Three: Elite Women, Marriage, and the Navigation of Dominant Ideologies in Early Sixteenth-Century Peru

Introduction

The Spanish conquest of what would later be called the Viceroyalty of Peru was as much a cultural and religious entanglement as it was a military clash. Nowhere is this more evident than in the most intimate relationships between peoples; the marriages between male conquistadores and indigenous women. Each individual came to their respective unions with gendered ideals that were distinct, often contradictory, and occasionally surprisingly compatible. The first of these marriages were between the most elite and most visible individuals from both groups: Inca princesses and Spanish conquistadors. This chapter focus on the lives of three of these individuals: Inca princesses Quispe Sisa and Cuxirimay, and one of the first *mestizas*, Doña Francisca Pizarro Yupanqui (see Appendix A for a family tree). All three women lived interrelated lives, sharing partners or blood relationships. Through an analysis of their parentage, marriages, relationships, and motherhood, we can better understand both the extreme contradictions and inconsistencies of the dominant social ideologies and how these three women navigated the use of their own agency in a drastically changing world.

Conflicting Gender Ideologies

Just as Mesoamerican gender norms had many commonalities and differences with the Spanish system, so too is it important to examine where Inca gender ideologies align with and contradict peninsular ideals. This includes perceptions of relations between genders, the importance of virginity, the mothering role, and the purpose of a marriage. In the Andean cultural context, it is vital to clarify exactly which indigenous

groups are being discussed. The Andean region pre-Spanish conquest was a complex and diverse assortment of multiple indigenous groups, each distinct from the other. These disparate peoples had all been subjugated by the dominant Inca group.⁸⁷ Common narratives of the Spanish conquest seem to obscure the fact that the Inca themselves had been a conquering power in a region that saw frequent conflict. By focusing on Inca gender ideologies, we can get a sense of the dominant ideology that would have been most intensely present in the larger cities and centers of commerce. It was in these regions, rather than the more dispersed outer reaches of the empire, that most contact between Spanish and indigenous individuals occurred. They are thus the locations of keenest conflict, as well as the places where Quispe Sisa, Cuxirimay, and Doña Francisca were born, raised, and, in the case of the former two, spent the majority of their lives.

Like Nahua society, Inca culture operated under a gender parallel system that regulated the roles of the men and women in their societies. A gender parallel society has entirely separate hierarchies for each gender. In this way, women and men operated within parallel but separate political and religious hierarchies that were headed up by the male Inca and his wife, the Coya, respectively. Within such structures, noblewomen especially could gain a significant amount of prestige and power that was entirely outside the realm of her husband or other male relatives.⁸⁸ Inca women thus did not conceive of themselves as being limited to the home or without any kind of ambition, but instead were considered perfectly capable public actors.

⁸⁷ Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3.

⁸⁸ Karen Viera Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 21.

Significantly, this level of independence does not signify that equality existed between the genders. A system of gender complementarity was still in effect in Inca society. This meant that men and women were assigned specific tasks and responsibilities according to gender. These tasks were supposed to complement each other, with one gender filling in where the other left off, so that both women and men were necessary for the successful running of a household on the small scale or an empire on a larger platform. For example, in the Inca empire, women were in charge of the entire process of creating textiles while men were in charge of any kind of fighting and most of the agriculture. Though these tasks were strictly divided by gender, they were considered equally important to the functioning of the empire.⁸⁹ Karen Powers notes that, though different, “women’s roles were not seen as subordinate to or less significant than those of men.”⁹⁰ Therefore, while a man would never participate in the weaving of cloth, he also would not consider it a lesser or unimportant task.

The Spanish gender system diverged sharply from both Inca and Nahua ideals with regards to its division of labor and conception of gender relations. Rather than having a parallel system with women ruling over women and men over men, Spaniards followed a tradition of patriarchy. Unlike gender parallelism, which was based in the involvement of the entire community, patriarchy took the family as its defining unit. Within the family, an implicit social contract was in place where the husband was dominant over his wife and children and they in turn “freely subordinated themselves to

⁸⁹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 15.

⁹⁰ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 17.

his authority.”⁹¹ Here it is important to note the difference between the ideological structures officially endorsed by the dominant powers, in this case the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church, and the lives of real people. There are countless examples of women who did not subordinate themselves, or did so only under duress. Likewise, men were rarely dictatorial tyrants ruling over their families with impunity. Still, this was the expectation of family life and structure that Spanish men in the Americas expected their wives to adhere to.

Instead of separate but interrelated gendered structures, both occurring at least partially in the public sphere, Iberian women’s movements were supposed to be limited to the home. Even in the home, however, women were not supposed to be in charge. The home was where a man “exercised uncontested patriarchal power over his spouse and children,” asserting his control in a theoretically feminine space.⁹² This paradox of male power in a female-centered space would have seemed foreign and illogical to the Inca who sanctioned complete female control in female spaces. Still, by the end of the century, Spanish colonialism had almost completely eradicated these distinct autonomous feminine spaces.⁹³

Perhaps one of the most important differences present in the Incan gender parallel system was the tradition of parallel descent. Irene Silverblatt describes this occurring where “Andean women perceived kinship and descent to follow lines of women, just as,

⁹¹ Richard Boyer, “Women, *La Mala Vida*, and the Politics of Marriage,” in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrín (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 252.

⁹² Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 119.

⁹³ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 41.

in parallel, men saw themselves as descending from and creating lines of men.”⁹⁴ This conception of descent was radically different from Nahua genealogy which considered descendants to come equally from both parents, as well as Spanish genealogy which privileged the father. This difference had two primary consequences. The first is that women would consider themselves to be an important part of their mother’s extended families. Rather than transitioning entirely into their husband’s families, married women would retain their links to their mother’s natal community, fostering connections that would benefit both groups. The second consequence was that women inherited directly from their mothers. This included ritual statuses, aristocratic titles, and even property, which they owned of their own accord.⁹⁵ The very fact that Inca women could, and did, own property differentiated how Spaniards and Incans viewed women and their capabilities.

Under Spanish law, women were considered minors because they “were thought to lack the innate ability to reason” just like children.⁹⁶ As minors, women could not own property, with the exception of their dowry, which they could not legally manage. Women also were prohibited from representing themselves in any type of court, especially if they were married. In the Andean tradition, by contrast, women were able to inherit, own and manage their own property regardless of marital status. In fact, some noble indigenous women were also given shares of tribute that the peasantry owed to aristocratic landowners.⁹⁷ It requires little imagination to recognize exactly where these

⁹⁴ Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches*, xxviii.

⁹⁵ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 17.

⁹⁶ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 41.

⁹⁷ Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches*, 7, 120.

two systems would come into conflict, and who would suffer most by the collision. By imposing Spanish legal codes and property laws, men of all groups benefitted while women in general, but indigenous poor women especially, suffered a loss of traditional rights and privileges.

Finally, Spanish and Andean traditions differed in regards to their conceptions of virginity. Virginity in the Andes was considered of little consequence, particularly among the peasantry. Just as in Nahua traditions, elite women operated within stricter boundaries, but even they would not be considered sinful or unmarriageable if they were not a virgin on their wedding night. In fact, a practice called ‘trial marriages’ was common throughout most of the Andes. In this practice, a couple would live together as a married couple for a time in order to test out their compatibility and comfort with each other. This was important to ensure the stability of the couple and, by extension, the community at large. In this way, “premarital cohabitation was a precautionary measure” and not a sin as in the Catholic church.⁹⁸

Inca marriage rites themselves “celebrated the formation of a new unity made up of equals” while Spanish marriages, particularly among the elite, were the final solidifying of the hierarchical social contract outlined in patriarchalism.⁹⁹ In truth, Spanish marriage traditions before the Council of Trent did not look terribly different from Inca rites. Both were centered around two individuals making an agreement to be married and then sexually consummating that union. It was not until after 1563 that the Council of Trent officially expanded this basic definition of marriage to include a

⁹⁸ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 55.

⁹⁹ Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches*, 8.

betrothal period that ended with a ceremony presided over by a priest.¹⁰⁰ The reforms created by the Council, which will be discussed in greater detail later, had been formulating in Europe for some time. In fact, many of the clergy who migrated to convert and preach in the Americas came with the intention of “put[ting] into place a society with tighter moral standards” than that of Spain.¹⁰¹ As such, many of the clergyman in the Viceroyalty of Peru condemned any marriage outside of the church even before Tridentine reforms. This created a power struggle between the conquistadors who followed simpler and more relaxed traditions of marriage, the priests who were trying to impose stricter control, and the Inca who also purported less complicated marriage rites. Often the legitimacy of a marriage depended not on which doctrine had the most power, but on what doctrine was professed by the individuals with the most power in a particular situation.

Inca marriages, similar to Nahua unions, were created with the intent to “secure and consolidate alliances with other important polities through marriage” and thus stabilize the rule of one group in a particular region.¹⁰² The Inca created webs of shared power and connections that continued beyond the original marriage with the children of secondary marriages acting as potential candidates for succession in the polities of their mothers, thus keeping the two original political units intact. In contrast, Spanish descent practices meant that while a marriage might unite regions or land masses, it would do so

¹⁰⁰ Allyson M. Poska, *Regulating the People: The Catholic Reformation in Seventeenth-Century Spain*, vol. 5 of *Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

¹⁰¹ Gonzalo Lamana, *Domination without Dominance: Inca-Spanish Encounters in Early Colonial Peru*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 176.

¹⁰² Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 29.

by combining the two areas into a single unified block. This basic difference in the purpose of marriage in relation to power meant that Incas who united with Spaniards expected to be expanding the influence of their family and polity, rather than restricting it to an ever shrinking elite group.¹⁰³ This is the basis behind the most common cultural misconception regarding gender relations in the first moments of contact, particularly in the most ubiquitous marriage pattern in which daughters or female relatives were given as wives to Spanish conquistadors.

In truth, the earliest colonial unions and marriages were not a free mixing of Andean and peninsular individuals, but instead were strictly coded with indigenous woman/Spanish man as the only acceptable alliance. The reverse, with indigenous men marrying Spanish women, almost never occurred. This was due both to a “reluctance, within the Spanish system, to give a woman in marriage to a man of a lower class” as well as the scarcity of Spanish women in the earliest years of conquest and colonization.¹⁰⁴ It also played into both Inca and Spanish conceptions of men being associated with warfare and violence. As Irene Silverblatt explains, in the Andean tradition, “conquerors” were envisioned as male. As such, “only men as “conquerors” could enter into secondary marriages with “conquered” women,” the reverse organization would be illogical given the traditional power structures.¹⁰⁵ Of the three women who feature most prominently in this analysis, this dichotomy of conquered/woman with conqueror/man was most prominent in the life of Quispe Sisa, to whom we now turn.

¹⁰³ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 58.

¹⁰⁴ Pedro Carrasco, “Indian-Spanish Marriages in the First Century of the Colony,” in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder et al. (Normal: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 90-91.

¹⁰⁵ Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches*, 74.

Quispe Sisa/Quispezira/Mama Quispe/Doña Inés Huaylas Yupanqui

Quispe Sisa, who was alternately called Quispeziera and Mama Quispe in various chronicles, was one of the very first women to enter into a long-term relationship with conquistador Francisco Pizarro. By tracing the trajectory of her life, we can see how incoherent and contradictory conceptions of legitimacy, race, acceptability, marriage, and motherhood created paradoxical social conditions that largely disadvantaged her. Despite these difficulties, Quispe Sisa was not a passive victim, but instead a clear agent within her own life, acting in ways that would benefit her the most at any given time.

Quispe Sisa was born to Huayna Capac and Contarguacho around 1516. Her mother, Contarguacho, had been one of the daughters of an influential *curaca*, or lower nobility, who worked as the administrator of an *ayllu*, or extended family group connected to a specific territory.¹⁰⁶ Contarguacho was a young lady when Huayna Capac passed by her ayllu in one of his travels, whereupon he “fell in love with her and she became one of his secondary wives.”¹⁰⁷ Her father must have been delighted to give her in marriage to Huayna Capac. Not only would marrying him raise her status, it would also build familial connections between the *curaca* and the Inca that would raise the status of the entire ayllu. Additionally, due to the laws of parallel descent, any male child birthed by Contarguacho could potentially run for succession in her home ayllu and have higher status himself because he was directly related to the Inca. When Contarguacho gave birth, shortly after the death of Huayna Capac himself, her daughter was considered

¹⁰⁶ Definitions from Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches*, 227-228.

¹⁰⁷ “uno de sus numerosos viajes,” “se enamoró de ella y la convirtió en una de sus esposas secundarias” María Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, *Doña Francisca Pizarro: Una Ilustre Mestiza, 1534-1598*, 1st ed. (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1989). All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

a legitimate descendant of the couple. This was both because Contarguacho was considered a legitimate wife, despite not being the primary wife, and because, for the Andeans, “there was no European equivalent to the concept of illegitimacy.”¹⁰⁸ The issue of legitimacy thus would not have played any role in Quispe Sisa’s life until well after she became an adult and was having her own children.

We know almost nothing of Quispe Sisa’s life from birth until her union with Francisco Pizarro in 1532. What we do know is that she probably grew up under the control and supervision of both her mother and her half-brother, Atahualpa. During this time, Atahualpa was fighting against his half-brother Huascar to become Inca after the death of their father, Huayna Capac.¹⁰⁹ She first appears in the historical narrative when she is ‘given’ by Atahualpa to conquistador Francisco Pizarro.¹¹⁰ Here is precisely where the stark differences in marital customs would have begun to play out clearly. Atahualpa and Quispe Sisa were acting out of a long tradition of presenting female relatives to military victors, reinforcing the dichotomy of conqueror/male and conquered/female. By facilitating Quispe Sisa’s relation to Pizarro, Atahualpa was attempting to form a military alliance with Pizarro and starting the process of cultivating the type of widespread connections and familial ties that would serve to preserve his own power and control.¹¹¹

It would be foolish to presume that Quispe Sisa was ignorant of the intentions of her brother. She would have understood perfectly the role she was to play by joining with

¹⁰⁸ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 29.

¹⁰⁹ In order to clarify some vocabulary, it is important to note that Inca is both the indigenous group and the name of the male leader of this group with *Coya* being the term for his primary wife, the main female leader. For more information, see Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, Chapter 1.

¹¹⁰ Sara Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women and the Politics of Marriage in Early Colonial Peru,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 24, no. 2 (2015): 147.

¹¹¹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 72.

Pizarro, having anticipated being married in a similar manner her whole life. Whether she was eager, at fifteen, to start a union with a man of fifty-six, some forty years her senior, we cannot begin to imagine.¹¹² Certainly she would have understood the importance of the union, and maybe even been honored to have been chosen for someone viewed as a worthy opponent and warrior. What we can presume, however, is that she would not have anticipated the differences in her vision of her marriage and the Spaniards' conception of the same partnership.

Quispe Sisa and Atahualpa both would have considered her married. The very nature of the couple's initial meeting, with Atahualpa literally offering Quispe Sisa's hand to Pizarro, and his subsequent acceptance, would have been more than enough to consider the two married based on Inca traditions.¹¹³ Even Quispe Sisa's baptism and consequent renaming as Doña Inés Huaylas Yupanqui, so named for Francisco Pizarro's late sister, would have seemed natural to a culture where new names were given for major accomplishments or at significant life changes.¹¹⁴ A new marriage would definitely have been a deserving occasion for a new name, further cementing the idea that this was a marriage.

Even Pizarro may have thought of the two as married. According to historian Sara Vicuña Guengerich, Pizarro's contemporaries claimed that "he made a formal public commitment to Quispe Sisa when he introduced her to his friends as his wife in a sort of betrothal ceremony."¹¹⁵ According to official Catholic regulations in place in 1532, no

¹¹² Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 75.

¹¹³ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 147.

¹¹⁴ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 19.

¹¹⁵ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 148.

ceremony with a priest was necessary to be married. The only two requirements, that they accept one another and then consummate that union, were fulfilled in this relationship. However, many historians refer to this relationship as merely marriage-like or even reference Quispe Sisa as Pizarro's mistress or concubine. The primary logic that distinguishes their union from a 'true' marriage is that both individuals later went on to have other relationships, both sanctioned and unsanctioned by the Church, after the dissolution of their alliance. This logic not only erases the historical context, where people did indeed get 'legitimately' married and then separated without the oversight of the Church, but also privileges Spanish notions of marriage as superior and primary. It also, while not changing the status or achievements of Pizarro in any way, uses rhetorical violence to reduce Quispe Sisa's role to that of an illicit and subordinate side character whose primary function is that of a passive sex object rather than an active agent in her own life.

There is plenty of evidence that their relationship was more than a mere sexual union. Pizarro was said to have treated Quispe Sisa well, even nicknaming her "pispita" or "pizpita" after a beautiful Andalusian bird, connoting both agility and intelligence when applied to women.¹¹⁶ She travelled largely with him during their union and, in one notable event, acted to help protect his interests. In 1536, Manco Inca, puppet emperor and founder of the neo-Inca state, sieged both the cities of Cuzco and Lima in an attempt to gain control of the primary urban centers. Manco Inca had the assistance of Azarpay, one of the primary wives of the late Huascar, who was in Lima along with Francisco

¹¹⁶ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 148, 162.

Pizarro, Quispe Sisa, and her mother Contarguacho. Unfortunately for Manco Inca, Quispe Sisa was not in favor of his plan, and denounced Azarpay to Pizarro who executed the ‘traitor’ and then was able to repel the military forces.¹¹⁷ As there is no record of Quispe Sisa expounding on her reasoning, we cannot be sure if she acted out of loyalty to Pizarro, allegiance to her late brother Atahualpa, a sense of rivalry with Azarpay, or even simple dislike and distrust of Manco Inca.¹¹⁸ Regardless of her motives, Quispe Sisa’s actions prove that she was an active agent, capable of making her own decisions based on her own moral code and reasoning process. She was not a mere mistress or concubine, but Pizarro’s partner.

Unfortunately, no matter how much we talk about Quispe Sisa’s agency and actions, she still married into a system that prioritized the decisions and actions of men over that of women. Quispe Sisa had probably assumed that her relationship with Pizarro would last the rest of her life. While the Inca tradition did allow for separation in conflictive relationships, such an action was rare among the elite.¹¹⁹ Besides, by all accounts, the two had had a largely positive relationship. Regardless, around 1538, about six years since the beginning of their union, Quispe Sisa was married to her second husband, Francisco de Ampuero, and Pizarro had, by this time, taken their children to be raised by some of his relatives.

Nothing illustrates the limits of personal agency indigenous women were able to exercise like the oft-repeated separation from their children they were forced to endure.

¹¹⁷ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 149.

¹¹⁸ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 28-29; Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 149, 163.

¹¹⁹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 32.

Malintzin was one such example, and the same pattern would be repeated hundreds of times over. Quispe Sisa herself had two children with Francisco Pizarro. Their oldest, Doña Francisca Pizarro, who will be examined in greater depth later, was born in 1534 and shortly succeeded by her brother Gonzalo Pizarro in 1535. By 1538, the children were living full-time with Francisco Pizarro's half-brother Martín de Alcántara and his Spanish wife Doña Inés Muñoz as Pizarro occupied himself with military and political matters.¹²⁰

This pattern would repeat itself with many indigenous women who were deemed incapable of providing a proper Spanish upbringing to their half-Spanish children. The theoretical tension necessary to maintain this position should not be understated. It was simultaneously considered a 'privilege' to marry these elite Inca women in the absence of more 'acceptable' Spanish women and was even completely acceptable to have children with them, but actually allowing them to raise their own progeny was out of the question.¹²¹ This was especially harmful because raising children was considered by the Spanish to be one of the primary tasks of wives and mothers. Yet indigenous women were considered unfit for this role because of a combination of "their prescribed racial 'inferiority' ... [and] the 'natural' inferiority of their gender."¹²² In order to maintain the contradiction inherent in naming the same woman a naturally honorable wife and an equally naturally deficient mother, clergy and Spaniards alike called on notions of indigenous women as faithful wives but fundamentally promiscuous beings. Because the

¹²⁰ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 78.

¹²¹ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 151.

¹²² Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 78.

Inca placed less emphasis on virginity, it was feared that indigenous mothers would not raise their daughters to be properly chaste and thus would impugn the honor of their fathers as well as endanger their immortal souls. The arrival of an ever-increasing number of Spanish women later in the century would allow for the easing of this circuitous justification by cutting indigenous women out of respectability politics altogether.

However, in the first moments of conquest and colony, mothers such as Quispe Sisa would have suffered most from these conflicts over legitimate mothers and caregivers. For them, there would have been no legal recourse. As an elite Inca woman, Quispe Sisa would have expected that at least her daughter would have been hers to raise and recognize as her descendant. Under the Spanish system, however, all children belonged to the father. This was so strictly enforced that even after Francisco Pizarro and Martín de Alcántara were assassinated in 1541, little Francisca and Gonzalo, as stipulated in Pizarro's will, continued to live with their aunt Doña Inés Muñoz instead of with their mother.¹²³ Doña Inés Muñoz, despite not actually having any direct relation to the children, was considered a more acceptable caregiver due solely to her position as a Spanish woman than the children's mother herself.

When Francisco Pizarro and Quispe Sisa separated, both of them found different partners in other relationships. For Quispe Sisa this meant marrying Francisco de Ampuero, Pizarro's former page. Unlike her union with Pizarro, this marriage was legitimated in the Catholic church. As such, it is considered by many to be one of the first 'true' mixed marriages in the new colony.¹²⁴ The accounts of the marriage differ, with

¹²³ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 78-80.

¹²⁴ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 153.

some scholars claiming that “she had been forced to marry him, once her lover [Pizarro] had discarded her” going so far to say that this new relationship “shamed her.”¹²⁵

Whether or not she felt ‘shamed’ by her status is pure conjecture, but it does remain clear that the marriage was not always a happy one.

At least one of de Ampuero’s motivations for marrying Quispe Sisa was economic. Francisco Pizarro had given her a rather considerable dowry upon separating, consisting largely of land that had once been her mother’s. In this way, he was respecting traditional Inca inheritance laws by passing land from mother to daughter.¹²⁶ According to both Spanish and Inca customs, the land thus was officially owned by Quispe Sisa and not her husband. However, as historian Sara Vicuña Guengerich noted, “the attractiveness of marrying a woman with a significant dowry rested on the ability of husbands to legally manage their wives’ property.”¹²⁷ Quispe Sisa’s husband was astute enough to know when to use Spanish law to his own advantage. Although Quispe Sisa had legal rights to her dowry, she did not have the right to administer it.¹²⁸ That right rested solely in the hands of de Ampuero, who took full advantage.

In the earliest years of the couple’s marriage, Quispe Sisa did not yet have the skills and knowledge to manipulate the legal system to her advantage. This is evidenced by an event that occurred in 1547 when Quispe Sisa contracted two healer women, Yangué and Yaro, to help her improve her relationship with de Ampuero. When the

¹²⁵ Stuart Stirling, *The Inca Princesses: Tales of the Indies* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), 40.

¹²⁶ It should be noted that, though Pizarro respected this particular tradition, it was well within his power to not do so. His control over the land he had taken limited the extent to which Quispe Sisa could truly control her own inheritance and set a precedent for men who were not so benevolent to feel empowered to control land dispersal themselves.

¹²⁷ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 152.

¹²⁸ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 119.

relationship failed to improve, the two healers agreed to help Quispe Sisa kill her husband. This action was prompted by her complaint that de Ampuero imposed the *mala vida* (dreadful life) on her. This particular phrasing was a euphemism for what we would term today domestic abuse or partner violence.¹²⁹ Additionally, she insisted that de Ampuero refused to allow her out of the home. As discussed earlier, Inca women, even elite ones, would not have experienced the same strict division between public and private spaces as practiced by the Spaniards. Even Pizarro had not held so close to the standards of patriarchalism, allowing Quispe Sisa to travel with him on his journeys and participate in his interactions. To be enclosed in her home would have felt stifling and isolating to a woman who had before participated as much in public as in the private.¹³⁰

In the Spanish legal system, there were some recourses for women who were being abused by their husbands. Such women could denounce their husbands in court, provided they had men who were willing to do the denouncing on their behalf since women could not represent themselves. Quispe Sisa's failure to lodge one of these complaints could be attributed to a variety of factors. At this early stage of the colony, she was probably significantly less familiar with Spanish legal customs, especially as the courts were still in their nascent stages in Peru. Additionally, the Inca did not have the same type of regulated and formalized court system as did the Spanish. As such, "Andean wives trying to rid themselves of unwanted husbands usually sought the aid of others" informally rather than through the court system or through "confronting their spouses

¹²⁹ Boyer, "Women, *La Mala Vida*, and the Politics of Marriage," 252-254.

¹³⁰ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 154-155.

themselves.”¹³¹ In this case, she employed two healer women to pray, burn tallow, and ‘cast spells’ in order to get de Ampuero to be kinder and less violent to her. When that failed to work, they gave Quispe Sisa herbs and powders to add to his food in order to “kill Ampuero slowly so that no one would suspect.”¹³²

All of this conflict is accessible to us in the present day precisely because Quispe Sisa failed to kill her husband and was ultimately found out. The resulting trial ended in the forgiveness of Quispe Sisa at the bequest of her husband and the burning of Yangué and Yaro for witchcraft. While it is impossible to rule out affection for his wife as motive of requesting her pardoning, the fact remains that de Ampuero would gain little from her death. Beyond the dishonor associated with having a wife connected to witchcraft, de Ampuero would have lost the ability to later petition for more dowry lands to be taken from his stepdaughter, Francisca Pizarro, and given to Quispe Sisa.¹³³ The other two indigenous women, by contrast, were disposable enough. They had no economic status to offer and their deaths would solidify the myth of Catholic control and superiority over both legal and spiritual matters.

For Quispe Sisa, though she had been legally pardoned and publically forgiven by her husband, the real consequences for her at home cannot be known. What we do know, however, is that her public participation from here on out was significantly more frequent as she was active in court cases and petitions regarding her dowry.¹³⁴ By 1564, Quispe

¹³¹ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 155.

¹³² Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 155.

¹³³ Jane E. Mangan, *Transatlantic Obligations: Creating the Bonds of Family in Conquest-Era Peru and Spain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 30-31.

¹³⁴ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 155.

Sisa was aware enough of Spanish legal traditions to take de Ampuero to court over the mismanagement of her dowry. Unable to enter into legal transactions on her own, she contacted a third party lawyer to retract the sale of lands de Ampuero had authorized without her consent. She won the case, having demonstrated both an active agency and an astute understanding of how to manipulate the Spanish legal system to her own advantage.¹³⁵ Eventually, the couple's period of intense conflict calmed significantly and the two began to take on court cases together rather than against one another.

In one significant case, de Ampuero had to work hard to define Quispe Sisa as a legitimate daughter and thus deserving of the inheritance of her mother, Contarguacho. His entire justification for wresting land from Francisca Pizarro rested on proving the legitimacy of her mother. As explained previously, no Andean equivalent for the Spanish conception of legitimacy existed, so Quispe Sisa would have been heir to her mother simply because she was her mother's daughter. Her husband, by contrast, had to work to justify her legitimacy within a Catholic context. Within the Catholic tradition, a child could only be considered legitimate if born to a married Catholic couple. That is to say, a couple had to profess the Catholic faith and also be married, preferably by a Catholic priest, although this was not required. Under this definition, it was impossible to consider any child born before the conquest 'legitimate' because no one was Catholic.¹³⁶

However, through a fusion of Andean and Catholic customs, de Ampuero managed to justify Quispe Sisa's possession of her own dowry. He claimed that she was legitimate by Andean customs, which would have to be sufficient in the absence of any

¹³⁵ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 156.

¹³⁶ Mangan, *Transnational Obligations*, 32.

other qualification. Once satisfied that he had successfully articulated her heritage, he went on to legitimate their own union. The inconsistency here occurs both in the silence in regards to Quispe Sisa's first relationship with Pizarro as well as the rhetoric used to legitimate her relationship with de Ampuero. Their marriage was characterized as fulfilling the concept of *vida maridable*, or the ideal way a couple should live together.¹³⁷ This is ironic considering what is known about their earlier domestic disputes. It also demonstrates the ways in which rhetoric was a tool that could be used judiciously, especially by those in a position of authority. Where Quispe Sisa was not able to give input into her own affairs, de Ampuero was able to successfully manipulate her situation, fusing two different discourses for his own benefit.

The blending of indigenous and Spanish discussions on marriage, legitimacy, and inheritance was often convoluted and contradictory. Nowhere was this more obvious than in the lives of indigenous women. Within this discourse, Quispe Sisa was simultaneously a 'legitimate' daughter while not fitting into any definition of legitimacy. She was an acceptable wife who could produce suitable children, but was intrinsically inadequate as a mother. While she navigated this discursive minefield to the best of her abilities, sometimes successfully, and other times not, she was still limited by the bounds of her personal situation. Nonetheless, the life of Quispe Sisa was not inevitable nor predestined, as evidenced by the vast differences in her life and experiences when compared to other Inca princesses of similar status and genealogy. Cuxirimay, another

¹³⁷ Mangan, *Transnational Obligations*, 34.

ñusta, or Incan princess, lived a life at once parallel to and extremely divergent from Quispe Sisa, as demonstrated by the following section.

Cuxirimay Oollo/Doña Angelina Yupanqui

Cuxirimay also lived her life at the intersections of conflicting ideologies. Her particularly high social status often served more to make her vulnerable than to provide safety. Throughout her life, she was in three separate relationships, all with varying degrees of legitimacy and Catholic control, and yet never lost her status as a respectable woman. Despite the significant difficulties that plagued her life, she was ultimately able to exercise significant agency and control over the production of her own life's narrative.

The exact genealogy of Cuxirimay Oollo remains uncertain. Juan de Betanzos, an interpreter of Quechua and chronicler who she married later in life, claims that she was the daughter of Yamque Yupanque and Tocto Oollo.¹³⁸ This made her the niece of Huayna Capac, father of Quispe Sisa, who was Inca at the time. According to de Betanzos, Huayna Capac was so overjoyed at Cuxirimay's birth that he threw a party for her and named her himself, declaring that she would be called Cuxirimay Oollo because together these names indicated she would be a "Lady who speaks good fortune."¹³⁹ Regardless of her exact genealogy, most Spaniards "recognized her as a capac woman," giving her additional status above other Inca nobility, including Quispe Sisa.¹⁴⁰

The importance of capac women only truly came into play about a generation before the arrival of the Spanish. The traditional practice of marriage across ayllus or

¹³⁸ Juan de Betanzos *Narrative of the Incas*, ed. Roland Hamilton, trans. Dana Buchanan, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 180.

¹³⁹ de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas*, 181.

¹⁴⁰ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 150.

between Inca and conquered peoples was as important as ever, but this system was paralleled with a privileging of capac children as the most elite. These children were descended from Manco Capac, through either the maternal or paternal line, rather than one of the more minor noble families. When they went on to have their own children, their descendants were considered more elite if their other parent was also of the capac line, and not of non-Inca or non-capac origin.¹⁴¹ To clarify, if the Inca had a daughter with a capac woman and a son by a non-capac woman, the daughter would have the higher status and could later go on to be the mother of the next Inca through a union with one of her siblings, cousins, or uncles. It is important to note that under this system none of the children would be considered illegitimate in the Catholic sense, nor would they be left out of inheriting from their parents. This was not a way of delegitimizing or disregarding children, but instead a way to consolidate the lineage of the ruling line through increased endogamous activity.

Cuxirimay's status as a capac woman made her an acceptable bride for Atahualpa, another capac descendant. Huayna Capac himself had declared that she would be the "principal wife of his son Atahualpa." It is hard to understate how complicated endogamy makes recounting genealogical connections. In Cuxirimay's case, she was related to Atahualpa because "on their father's side they were cousins; and on their mothers' side they were first cousins because their mothers were sisters."¹⁴² This high level of relation meant that both Atahualpa and Cuxirimay would have had the pedigree necessary to produce the next Inca ruler. The need to solidify a commitment between these two when

¹⁴¹ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 147.

¹⁴² de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas*, 181.

Cuxirimay was still a baby speaks to the high importance given to these bloodlines and the imperative to secure highly-valued capac women for elite men.

In between Cuxirimay's birth and her adulthood, there is only one mention of her in de Betanzos's account. He records that, after a battle in which Atahualpa allied with her brother, Cuxi Yupanque, Atahualpa ordered that Cuxirimay be brought to him. She was to be handled with care as his future bride. At this point, just a few months shy of the conquest in 1532, Cuxirimay was only ten years old.¹⁴³ This particular account is interesting because of the ways in which it constructs her personality. She is described as being distraught over what she assumed was the death of her brother. Atahualpa's generals find her crying helplessly, surrounded by her dedicated servants, on the bloody battlefield. Once informed that her brother is still alive, she follows obediently, acts gratefully towards Atahualpa, and generally behaves with decorum. She is characterized as being dedicated to her family and obedient to her brother and future husband. These traits, when taken together, paint a positive picture of her character by Spanish standards. This is only logical when we take into account that this chronicle was produced between 1551 and 1557, during which time de Betanzos was married to Cuxirimay.¹⁴⁴ This also might account for the presence of her chaperones, even in the midst of war. De Betanzos would have wanted to protect her image as a properly chaste and virtuous young lady by placing emphasis on particular details that may have seemed unimportant or minor to Cuxirimay herself.

¹⁴³ de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas*, 198.

¹⁴⁴ Roland Hamilton, "Introduction," in *Narrative of the Incas*, Juan de Betanzos, ed. Dana Buchanan, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), ix.

In truth, it is significant that, despite Cuxirimay and her family being the primary sources of information for de Betanzos, she appears a mere four times in the narrative. Even then she appears as a “shadowy figure behind the glitter of the men in her life.”¹⁴⁵ Despite her few appearances, we should not underestimate the influence she had on de Betanzos’s narrative. The entire chronicle is skewed heavily in favor of Atahualpa instead of his half-brother Huascar, reflecting her personal perceptions and feelings for the two individuals. Her fingerprints are in the narrative as much as de Betanzos’s words, to the point where it is difficult to untangle informant from recorder, impossible to flesh out her thoughts from his as both have been mediated into a single document. It is thus best to view the entire narrative as a murky mix of the two voices.

When all of this fusion of thought is made evident, it is somewhat easier to understand the ambiguities that infuse the narrative. This is especially evident with regards to the marriage ceremony between Cuxirimay and Atahualpa. The two had their marriage ceremony when Cuxirimay was only ten.¹⁴⁶ In this ceremony, Cuxirimay fasted with her brother before being brought in front of Atahualpa. Then “Cuxi Yupanque and the rest of his kinsmen and relatives there assembled begged Atahualpa to see fit to receive her as his... principal wife.”¹⁴⁷ Atahualpa agreed, thus publically uniting the two in front of their extended ayllu groups, and the new union was celebrated through a series of parties.

¹⁴⁵ Hamilton “Introduction,” in *Narrative of the Incas*, x.

¹⁴⁶ Hamilton “Introduction,” in *Narrative of the Incas*, x.

¹⁴⁷ de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas*, 204.

The difficulty in calling the relationship between Cuxirimay and Atahualpa a marriage lies in the specifics of marriage. Both in the Inca tradition as in Spanish practice, the marital promise has to come attached with a sexual consummation in order for the union to be valid. However, the general consensus between scholars is that the union was never consummated. Roland Hamilton asserts that, due to her young age, “the union was probably never consummated and was more ceremonial than anything else.”¹⁴⁸ In a similar vein, Vicuña Guengerich claims that “their marriage was not consummated because of the arrival of the Spaniards.”¹⁴⁹ De Betanzos’s chronicle is unsurprisingly silent on the matter, not commenting any further than saying that the marriage ceremony occurred. Whether he left this information out because he deemed it inappropriate or irrelevant for a chronicle or because he was protecting the reputation of his wife, de Betanzos would have had little incentive to record such intimate details.

Assuming that the union was not consummated, how then can we account for this deviation from tradition? While both age and the imminent arrival of the Spanish undoubtedly played a significant role in the formation of this union, they do not comprise the whole picture. Once we remember Cuxirimay’s particular status as a *capac* woman, however, everything becomes a bit clearer. Undoubtedly Atahualpa, playing into bloodline politics, would have wanted to secure a union with Cuxirimay as soon as possible. This drive for *capac* women as partners could have been pressing enough that making the initial claim in the form of a ceremony was more important than fully legitimizing the union as a sexual partnership. Thus, even within Inca culture, theoretical

¹⁴⁸ Hamilton, “Introduction,” in *Narrative of the Incas*, xiii.

¹⁴⁹ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 158.

understandings of marriages did not always line up with reality. People with power or social status could easily subvert tradition or justify their deviations from standard practice, demonstrating the incoherence of ideology.

Sometime between 1532 and 1538, Cuxirimay, just like Quispe Sisa, received a baptismal name. She became Doña Angelina Yupanqui, a standard last name for the ñustas of the former empire. Exactly what happened to her during these six years is uncertain. We know she was at one point raped by the controversial interpreter Felipillo, an act which has largely been interpreted as a humiliation to Atahualpa—a personal as well as political attack.¹⁵⁰ Beyond this moment, we know nothing of her life until she enters into a relationship with Francisco Pizarro in Cuzco in approximately 1538. The relationship between Cuxirimay and Francisco Pizarro resists easy classification, especially in comparison with Quispe Sisa and Pizarro. Their relationship was most likely more of a “strategic marriage-like relationship” than a true marriage.¹⁵¹ While sexual consummation is evident through the presence of their two sons Juan and Francisco, nowhere is mention made of them exchanging promises or vows to be married.¹⁵² Additionally, although Pizarro had taken measures to legitimate his children by Quispe Sisa, which will be discussed in later, he made no such effort with Cuxirimay’s sons.¹⁵³ Instead, their short union, which lasted from about 1538 until Francisco’s death in 1541, was characterized by political necessity.

¹⁵⁰ Stirling, *The Inca Princesses*, 17. When historians interpret her assault in terms of Atahualpa’s power and control rather than by the effect it would have had on her, they both situate Cuxirimay as object and reinforce the same gendered hierarchy that was present in these chronicles themselves.

¹⁵¹ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 150.

¹⁵² Hamilton, “Introduction,” in *Narrative of the Incas*, x.

¹⁵³ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 75.

In the very nascent stages of the Viceroyalty of Peru, underdeveloped governmental and military structures meant that the Spanish were far from achieving total control over the indigenous population. Numerous uprisings, multiple elite men vying for the position of Inca, and continuing rebellions and outbreaks meant that even privileged men like Francisco Pizarro were not secure in their positions. This may have been why Pizarro left what was by all accounts a companionable and pleasant relationship with Quispe Sisa to join with Cuxirimay, literally abandoning one woman in favor of the other. He may have “felt that a new alliance with such a noblewoman would transform his image among the natives, making him even comparable to [the] Inca.”¹⁵⁴ A relationship with Cuxirimay thus gave Pizarro a higher status among the Inca, which in turn earned him the military support necessary to thwart indigenous uprisings. Once again, Cuxirimay’s special status as a *capac* woman made her a particularly appealing partner, even more so than Quispe Sisa, an elite woman with a similar status and background.

Whether or not this high status could truly be called a privilege is debatable, especially considering the violence and degradation she experienced at the hands of men of power such as Felipillo and Pizarro. Nonetheless, just like Quispe Sisa, Cuxirimay was not without agency or the desire to make the best of her situation. According to de Betanzos, it was Cuxirimay who led Pizarro to the wealth of Topa Inca Yupanque, hidden in Cuzco. He relates that “the statue, along with the gold image that was on top of his tomb, was taken by Manco Inca from the city when he revolted. On the advice that Doña

¹⁵⁴ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 150.

Angelina Yupanque gave to the Marquis Don Francisco Pizarro, he got it and the rest of the wealth with it.”¹⁵⁵ This act of aid could be read as an act of loyalty towards her new partner or as a favor done for a new ally. She could have been attempting to form a pleasant relationship with her new partner. She also could have simply given Pizarro the information to spite Manco Inca, of whom she, like Quispe Sisa, was reportedly not very fond. Regardless, Cuxirimay may have had a significant impact in terms of securing wealth for Pizarro. At the very least she, through de Betanzos, was able to help formulate a narrative that put her in this role of helper and ally, articulating her own agency and role as an active agent.

After the death of Francisco Pizarro in 1541, Cuxirimay remained unmarried for a time until she united with Juan de Betanzos in 1544.¹⁵⁶ Pizarro had left her a significant dowry in the Yucay Valley, just as he had done with Quispe Sisa. Cuxirimay brought these holdings into her new marriage as her own property. She and de Betanzos were married in the Catholic tradition under the supervision of the Spanish governor Vaca de Castro. The Spanish Crown, out of a sense of concern regarding the immense dowries of Inca women, as well as a certain level of respect for nobility, had placed “special emphasis on protecting Inca women, and if possible, marrying them to hidalgos” or other respectable men.¹⁵⁷ Vaca de Castro had received the orders from the Crown and accordingly arranged several marriages for elite Inca women and Spanish men. Juan de Betanzos, having previously translated confessionals and prayer books for the Church,

¹⁵⁵ de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas*, 139.

¹⁵⁶ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 157.

¹⁵⁷ Vicuña Guengerich, “Capac Women,” 152.

was considered respectable enough to merit a marriage to Cuxirimay. It is important to note that at this point in her life she was clearly not a virgin, having borne two children out of wedlock, and had never been married in any Catholic sense to any of her partners. While she was still a *capac* woman as well as a wealthy heiress, she now lacked some of the basic qualities for a perfect wife. Betanzos was thus respectable enough to be worthy of an Inca woman, but not so elevated as to be unable to overlook an imperfect past.

Unlike Quispe Sisa's marriage with de Ampuero, de Betanzos and Cuxirimay do not show up again in the legal record, except for a small petition confirming Cuxirimay's dowry holdings in 1550. This may indicate a higher level of amicability between the two.¹⁵⁸ Certainly communication would have been easier as de Betanzos was uncommonly skilled in Quechua. We also have to remember that Cuxirimay related a good portion of her personal as well as familial history to de Betanzos for his narrative, implying a decent level of closeness and communication. Whatever their personal feelings for each other, the two remained together until Cuxirimay's death, the exact date of which is unknown. At that point, de Betanzos remarried a Spanish woman, keeping Cuxirimay's dowry for his new family.¹⁵⁹

Cuxirimay's three primary relationships in her life, with Atahualpa, Francisco Pizarro, and Juan de Betanzos, were each distinct and outside of norms subscribed by either Spanish or Inca culture. With Atahualpa, her union lacked the fundamental consummation, while her relationship with Pizarro lacked exactly the opposite, the vow. Only in de Betanzos did she find a full marriage according to both traditions. She did,

¹⁵⁸ Vicuña Guengerich, "Capac Women," 158.

¹⁵⁹ Stirling, *The Inca Princesses*, 42-43.

however, manage to obtain certain benefits from each relationship. From Atahualpa she received claim to a high status that would be recognized by Spanish men as well as Inca, Pizarro gave her rights to her mother's land as her dowry, and her relationship with de Betanzos gave her the opportunity to shape her own narrative, albeit in a mediated manner. In relation to Quispe Sisa, Cuxirimay was also able to obtain a dowry from her mother's former lands, had relationships not recognized in the Catholic Church then eventually married in the Catholic manner with a husband who was to remain her final partner, and had to navigate the complexity of shifting conceptions of gender and the marital role. Although the two led different lives in terms of social status and public presence, there were many similarities in their stories that changed significantly in the next generation of their family. This is evident in the life of the final woman in this chapter, Doña Francisca.

Doña Francisca Pizarro Yupanqui

Francisca was born in 1534 to Francisco Pizarro and Quispe Sisa, just two short years after her father landed in Peru to begin the conquest in earnest.¹⁶⁰ Hailed by many as one of the first *mestizas*, she had to navigate not only the contradictions inherent in the emerging colonial society, but also her place in the margins of the worlds of her two parents. Although the Viceroyalty of Peru would quickly be divided between a *república de indios* and a *república de españoles*, in these first moments of a budding colony, there was no precedent for categorizing a person with her mixed heritage. Without any clear model to follow, Francisca was largely ascribed a position within a white, European

¹⁶⁰ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 17.

society, though this division was neither straightforward nor clear-cut, and would ultimately affect the decisions and opportunities she had throughout the duration of her reasonably long life.

As has been previously mentioned, the marriage between Quispe Sisa and Francisco Pizarro was not recognized by the Catholic Church, thus making Francisca and her younger brother Gonzalo illegitimate children in the eyes of the law. Had they come from less prominent parentage, this most likely would not have been a serious issue. In Spain, most children were effectively legitimate if their parents named them as heirs, and little else mattered. For Francisca and Gonzalo, however, their significant inheritance made their personal legitimacy of key importance. Due to this, in 1535, after the birth of Gonzalo, Francisco Pizarro petitioned the Crown to settle this affair. The king responded. On November 10, 1536, Francisca and her brother were legitimated by royal decree.¹⁶¹ This single act illustrates well the incoherence of the dominant ideology, and the way in which social and economic power can effectively invalidate supposedly universal rules.

When the king legitimized the young Pizarros, he did not also validate the marriage between their parents. Thus, through the eyes of the state, Francisca was a legitimate daughter born to an illegitimate union. She was legitimate, not because of the actions or purity of her parents, nor because the Pope, as mouthpiece of God, had declared it so. Instead, the king himself validated her position, thereby undermining much of the religious justification for legitimacy standards. It is hard to imagine another situation in which a less privileged couple would be able to petition the same from the

¹⁶¹ Vega, *Conquistadoras*, 182.

king. For many children born outside of Catholic sanctioned marriages, their fate “depended entirely on the will of their fathers” who could decide to attempt to legitimize them, support them without leaving them inheritance, or just ignore them entirely.¹⁶² In Francisca’s case, she was only legitimated because her father desired it. Her half-siblings by the same father did not share in her good fortune and were cut entirely from Francisco’s estate. Here the incongruous nature of legitimacy challenges simplistic narratives of universal ideals. Circumstances and power mediated legitimacy to the point where it could not be considered a discrete and logical social force.

Ultimately, Francisca’s legitimization was only the first step in a series of events that would serve to *españolizarse*, or make her more Spanish. When Francisca was three or four, her father left her mother for Cuxirimay, leaving her in turn with his brother Alcántara and his wife Inés Muñoz.¹⁶³ The first purpose of this was to separate children from indigenous mothers who could potentially convey unwanted characteristics or behaviors. The second reason was to ensure the propagation of ‘proper’ Spanish culture. Powers notes that, “as far as mestizas... were concerned, the first half of the sixteenth century saw concerted Spanish efforts, both private and public, to ensure that they would be raised as (or transformed into) cultural Spaniards.”¹⁶⁴ Francisca was raised to be a proper Spanish lady and was trained in reading, writing, dancing, and playing the clavichord.¹⁶⁵ All of her education was centered around forming her to be the ideal Iberian woman, following precepts of “female obedience, submission, religious fervor,

¹⁶² Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 134.

¹⁶³ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 78.

¹⁶⁴ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 82.

¹⁶⁵ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 31.

chastity, and legal inferiority.”¹⁶⁶ Thus the only person capable of raising her properly was her biological uncle’s wife, Inés Muñoz.

Inés Muñoz influenced Francisca’s life enough to merit some consideration here. According to her own account, she was one of the few Spanish women to come to the Americas already married instead of in search of a husband. Without any surviving children, she reportedly relished the job of raising Francisca and Gonzalo, and was devastated by the death of Gonzalo at the age of eleven in 1546. Faithful in her role as a good wife, she nonetheless refuted norms of passivity when her husband and brother-in-law were killed in 1541, retrieving their bodies herself. This was the woman who raised Francisca, equal parts “strong and dominant” while being most comfortable in the home.¹⁶⁷ Upon Francisca’s expulsion from Peru, Inés Muñoz married a second time, had a son, and was widowed yet again. She renounced her claim to the *encomienda*, not wanting to remarry in order to keep it, and instead passed it to her son who died childless the following year, leaving her penniless. Destitute, she joined a convent where she lived out the rest of her days.¹⁶⁸ Inés Muñoz’s life provides an excellent foil to that of Francisca. While Francisca ultimately was able to navigate the legal system successfully, a combination of bad luck and unpredictable circumstances robbed Inés Muñoz of the same opportunity. In her case, as with so many other women, discriminatory and gendered laws were not merely an inconvenience, but an obstacle to achieving a comfortable and sustainable livelihood.

¹⁶⁶ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 83.

¹⁶⁷ “fuerte y dominante,” Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 31.

¹⁶⁸ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 33-35.

Despite a comfortable childhood living with her aunt, Francisca did not pass her adulthood in the Americas. Instead, she was exiled to Spain by a royal decree that expelled Francisco Pizarro's descendants from the New World. The king, in a clear shift from his earlier legitimation of the Pizarro children, was nervous about the potential rebellious power of the Pizarro name. In 1548, Francisca's uncle Gonzalo led a revolt in response to the establishment of the *Leyes Nuevas*, or New Laws, of 1542 that limited the encomienda system and Spanish control over indigenous workers.¹⁶⁹ In addition to executing Gonzalo, the Crown decided to remove all of the Pizarro children from the continent entirely, bringing them to Spain where they could not encourage large-scale treason. So, on March 15, 1551 at age seventeen, Francisca prepared to cross the ocean to Spain, leaving Peru behind forever.

As can be imagined, this moment of embarking lends itself well to dramatization; a bad habit to which even historians are sometimes prone. In fact, many historians take this moment of physical distancing to talk of her mentally reconciling her two sides: that of her indigenous mother and Spanish father. Carlos Vega claims that she could be considered "the perfect mestiza, lover of both her lineages, for which she felt equal passion and reverence."¹⁷⁰ Álvaro Vargas Llosa, by contrast, claims that she would have felt excitement leaving behind "ashes, superficial and silent family members" in a land where her father had died, in exchange for the land of his birth and her 'mythical' uncle

¹⁶⁹ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 80.

¹⁷⁰ "la perfecta mestiza, amante de sus dos linajes por los que sentía igual pasión y reverencia," Vega, *Conquistadoras*, 180.

who lived there.¹⁷¹ Stuart Stirling strongly asserts that she did not “much care for her mother, whose existence only served to remind her of her mixed blood.”¹⁷² All these assertions are based either on the speculation of the individual historian, or from the single document we have written by Francisca herself, her will.

In this will, she mentions her mother only once, leaving some lands to her in the event of Francisca’s death. She states that she leaves part of her immense property to “doña Inés Iupangui [sic], my mother, wife of the aforementioned Francisco de Ampuero, who will care for and inherit all of these.”¹⁷³ This mention has been interpreted in turn as a dutiful daughter caring for her mother and a reluctant afterthought from a child more concerned with other relations.¹⁷⁴ The distance between mother and daughter is clear in this document. Francisca does not elaborate on her affection for her mother as she does her uncle Gonzalo, nor does she enumerate her mother’s positive qualities. One has to wonder, however, at the restrictions Francisca would have faced in writing this will and testament. At only seventeen years of age, it is doubtful that she would have been able to write this hugely important document without the influence of the authority figures in her life. Her uncle, aunt, and various tutors would all have had a stake in what went into the document. Not to mention, Francisca was taken from her mother for the exact purpose of preventing any kind of contamination by association. In this circumstance, there was no possible benefit she could have received from elaborating on

¹⁷¹ “cenizas, vacíos y silencios familiares,” Álvaro Vargas Llosa, *La mestiza de Pizarro: Una princesa entre dos mundos*, 1 ed., (Madrid: Aguilar, 2003), 194-195.

¹⁷² Stirling, *The Inca Princesses*, 93.

¹⁷³ “doña Ines Iupangui, mi madre, muger del dicho Francisco de Ampuero, la qual quiero que los aya y herede todos,” Francisca Pizarro “Testamento de Doña Francisca Pizarro,” in *Doña Francisca Pizarro: Una ilustre mestiza 1534-1598*, 1st ed. (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1989), 100-101.

¹⁷⁴ Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest*, 80.

her affection for someone who was a supposed negative influence, especially because her illiterate mother would not have been able to read the document herself. I posit that this document tells us little of her feelings for her mother one way or another, save that Francisca thought of her at all and chose to ensure that she was not destitute in the case of Francisca's passing.

Regardless of her feelings, thoughts, or wishes, Francisca was soon on a boat headed toward Spain. She did not travel alone, however. She was accompanied by three of her relations: her stepfather, Francisco de Ampuero, her half-brother by her father and Cuxirimay, also named Francisco Pizarro, and her half-sister by her mother and de Ampuero, Inés. The presence of the young Inés on this journey is of particular note. Unlike the Pizarro children, Inés had no real purpose on this journey. De Ampuero justified her presence by stating that he feared that she would "not [be] in good hands" if she was left in Peru.¹⁷⁵ The implications are clear. Just as Quispe Sisa was not trusted to raise her children by Pizarro, neither was she considered a fit mother for her daughter by de Ampuero. Once again, she was an acceptable wife but unacceptable mother, and had to remain in Peru with her two remaining adult sons, but without her husband or daughters.¹⁷⁶

Francisco de Ampuero's plan, upon arriving in Spain, was to leave Francisca with her aunt Isabel, half-sister of her father and full sister of her uncle Hernando. However, Hernando, as the head of the family, ordered de Ampuero to bring Francisca to him at

¹⁷⁵ "mal recaudo," Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 45.

¹⁷⁶ Mangan, *Transnational Obligations*, 30.

Medina del Campo.¹⁷⁷ Until this moment, Hernando had been living imprisoned in the castle La Mota for having planned and executed the murder of Diego de Almagro, Francisco Pizarro's one-time partner in the conquest. As with many men of privilege, Hernando's punishment for this crime was not considerable. As the only legitimate son out of his four brothers, Hernando had grown up in the court and was not unaware of his influence. While imprisoned in a literal castle, a young noblewoman, Doña Isabel Mercado, acted as his mistress. At less than eighteen years of age, Doña Isabel's impoverished but entitled family had sent her to live with Hernando under the hopes that he would agree to marry her and thus provide for her livelihood. However, Pizarro made no such promise. Instead, Doña Isabel acted in effect as Hernando's mistress, giving birth to five children, only two of which lived to adulthood. By her own account, she was permitted to leave the castle only a handful of times a year in order to attend confession.¹⁷⁸ The power differences here can hardly be understated. That Hernando, a wealthy and old man, technically a prisoner for murder, was able to in turn imprison and impregnate a young noble girl without consequences speaks highly to the precarity of women's social positions.

When Francisca arrived in Medina del Campo in 1552, Doña Isabel was sent away to a convent, her children presumably left with her husband in his luxury prison. It is not hard to imagine why Hernando had ordered Francisca to be brought to him. He would have been more than aware of her massive territories and the tremendous wealth that came with her dowry. He also would have been aware of her beauty. Years before,

¹⁷⁷ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 62.

¹⁷⁸ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 61.

Gonzalo Pizarro had written to Hernando explaining how “beautiful and grown-up” the then eleven-year-old Francisca was.¹⁷⁹ It appears as though Gonzalo had for a time considered marrying Francisca himself, and might have tried had he not been killed before she came of age.¹⁸⁰ In any case, Hernando clearly had designs on Francisca because no sooner did she arrive to La Mota than the two were married.

Whether or not Francisca had truly wanted to be married to Hernando, it is not hard to imagine her reasoning for consenting. Having just arrived in an unfamiliar country, under the control of her stepfather, with whom she did not get along, she would have had few allies and fewer resources. Being transported straight from her journey directly into Hernando’s prison, she would have had little other recourse. Still, there were also pragmatic reasons that could have inspired her. Familial allegiance was one such motivation, as was the knowledge that Hernando was a wealthy man in his own right and thus could use, but was not dependent on, her dowry for survival. There is also the pragmatic matter that Hernando was old enough to be her grandfather, already fifty-one to Francisca’s seventeen. It is entirely possible that she believed he would not live much longer. If she knew of Doña Isabel’s existence she would have been aware that, in all likelihood, Hernando as the head of family and a powerful man, would be able to keep her with him, with or without a church-sanctioned marriage. Whether or not Francisca was particularly attracted to Hernando, the material benefits of marrying him far outweighed the potential risks.

¹⁷⁹ “Hermosa y grande que estaba,” Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 38.

¹⁸⁰ Vega, *Conquistadoras*, 183.

Francisca and Hernando remained confined in La Mota for more than nine years. During that time, they had five children, of which three lived to adulthood. Once they were permitted to leave the castle, they moved to Madrid where they founded the Pizarro *mayorazgo*, or hereditary entitled estate in the Americas, cementing their financial and political power.¹⁸¹ Most of their relationship together centered precisely around this long distance economic consolidation of their family's wealth and influence. It is much harder to flesh out the details of their private lives. In the course of the conquest, Hernando had proved himself to be cruel and merciless over those he had defeated.¹⁸² In his private life, he had proved himself capable of using those with less influence and then discarding them when better opportunities presented themselves.

One of the most influential historians to study the saga of the Pizarros in-depth, Raúl Porras Barrenechea, reports that the couple had an ideal marriage and that in his will Hernando had nothing but effusive praise for his wife. Of course, Porras Barrenechea also reports that Francisca was always perfectly submissive and silent, which is contradicted by the proliferation of legal cases regarding her dowry, in which she took a leading role. Additionally, he clarifies that Hernando's testament insisted that Francisca not remarry, even after Hernando's death.¹⁸³ If Hernando could be admired for anything, it would be his sheer audacity in seriously insisting, in such a hypocritical and narcissistic manner, that Francisca be denied the very companionship that had been readily available to him all his life. However, Francisca proved to not be the mindlessly obedient wife

¹⁸¹ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 64.

¹⁸² Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 58.

¹⁸³ Raúl Porras Barrenechea, *El Testamento de Pizarro*, (Paris: Imprimeries Les Presses modernes, 1936), quoted in Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 64.

Porras Barrenechea described. Within three years of Hernando's death, in direct opposition to his final wishes, she married again.¹⁸⁴

Unlike her first marriage, in which she was the younger party by a good thirty-four years, Francisca was actually older than her second husband. She married the penniless Pedro Arias Portocarrero, an impoverished aristocrat, in November of 1581. The two probably came to know one another when Francisca's son married Portocarrero's sister, some years before. With her marriage to Portocarrero, Francisca's daughter-in-law became her sister-in-law as well.¹⁸⁵ Spanish elite could be just as endogamous as the Inca. Francisca's marriage to Portocarrero is significant in several ways. Unlike both Quispe Sisa and Cuxirimay, Francisca chose her own husband, and a younger one at that. She was also the primary caregiver for each of her three children. Despite her mixed heritage, she was considered a respectable Spanish lady, with all the trappings that entailed. As such, there was never a question of her caring for her children, something that was far out of reach for her mother. Francisca also had a fair amount of control over her own financial resources. By the time of her death, she and her husband had spent nearly all of her vast fortune, though they could hardly be called impoverished with their remaining resources.¹⁸⁶

Francisca remained married to Portocarrero until her death in 1598. By all accounts, their marriage appears to be a pleasant one, with few conflicts beyond the excessive spending of her wealth. Upon her death, Francisca's remaining goods and lands

¹⁸⁴ Stirling, *Inca Princesses*, 97.

¹⁸⁵ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 69-70.

¹⁸⁶ Rostworowski, *Doña Francisca Pizarro*, 71.

went to her three children, who all ended up dying childless. In one of those ironic moments of history, it was the descendants of Doña Isabel Mercado and Hernando Pizarro who ended up inheriting Francisca's properties all the way across the sea.¹⁸⁷ Francisca's life had been marked by such paradoxes. She was a mestiza considered Spanish, a legitimate child born to an illegitimate union, the wife of a powerful prisoner, and a wealthy heiress without any heirs. She was simultaneously extremely powerful as a property owner and extremely limited in the options left to her as a woman. These paradoxes, far from being unusual, demonstrate the incoherency and inconsistency of Spanish gendered ideologies.

Conclusions

It is easy to see the differences in the lives of these three women. Quispe Sisa and Cuxirimay were separated by the status of their bloodlines, even while belonging to the same family. Francisca benefitted from her perceived 'Spanishness,' both economically and socially, in ways that her indigenous relatives were unable to. Both Quispe Sisa and Cuxirimay were replaced by more acceptable or higher-ranking wives while in Francisca's case, she was the replacement.

It is even easier to draw superficial parallels between the lives of these three women. Each of them was married multiple times, with at least one of these marriages being to a man more than thirty years their senior. They were each mothers several times over, though their story of mothering differed greatly between them. Each of them was born outside of a Catholic-sanctioned marriage, but was considered legitimate regardless.

¹⁸⁷ Stirling, *Inca Princesses*, 96-97.

They all were heiresses and used the Spanish legal system to legitimate these landholdings.

On a deeper level, these three women had more in common than these superficial life events. They all exercised agency in their struggle with the incoherencies and contradictions of the dominant ideological system. Along the binaries of legitimate/illegitimate, acceptable/unacceptable, each of these women fell somewhere in the middle and had to grapple with the real material consequences of these paradoxes. Their varying degrees of success can be attributed, not only to their own ambitions, but also their particular social identities that gave them access, or not, to dominant power structures. Quispe Sisa's family connections, Cuxirimay's *capac* status, and Francisca's Spanishness limited the possibilities of their lives while not defining their trajectory.

The lives and experiences of Quispe Sisa, Cuxirimay, and Francisca Pizarro occurred at a very particular historical moment that would not be repeated again. Within a few decades of Francisco Pizarro's landing on the continent, waves of emigration from Spain began to change both the physical and social landscape of the New World. Spanish women in particular emigrated to improve their lot in life and, in so doing, began to replace the indigenous and mestiza women who had made such conscientious use of Spanish and indigenous systems. By the end of the century, these Spanish women would create a space for themselves that did not exist prior, displacing those born on the continent itself. It is to some of these emigrants we now turn.

An Abridged Timeline of the Spanish Empire

- 1503- *La Casa de la Contratación* (House of Trade) is founded by Isabella I
- 1516- Charles I of Spain (Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire) begins his reign
- 1524- *Consejo de las Indias*, Council of the Indies, is formed to help the king govern and regulate overseas territories
- 1545-1563- Council of Trent meets, sanctifies matrimony as a sacrament
- 1563- *Tametsi* decree from Council of Trent enters into effect
- 1556- Charles I abdicates, leaving his brother Ferdinand most of his European landholdings, and his son Philip all Spanish-controlled land
- 1556- Philip II becomes king of Spain and its American and Asian landholdings, starts Spain's *Siglo de Oro* or Golden Age
- 1573- Philip outlines his *Ordenanzas del Bosque de Segovia* in which he orders the populating of the American continents according to very exacting standards
- 1598- Death of Philip II
- 1598- Philip III becomes king

**Women in Motion:
An Epistolary Analysis of Marriage in the Sixteenth-Century Spanish Empire**

Introduction

Empires are not produced solely by warfare. One of the many converging strands in the tapestry of the emerging Spanish Empire involves the migration of Spanish women to the Americas as an essential component in the process of producing an empire. This migration was predicated, not only on Spanish and Catholic standards for an ideal marriage, but also around messages regarding gender constraints, honor, family ties, and legitimacy. In this chapter, I will use eight different letters, written from emigrants to their families back home in Spain, to examine the intersections between conceptions of marriage, gender, class, and education in a transatlantic context. These eight letters, or *cartas*, can be viewed as a type of cross-section of migrant letters from the sixteenth century preserved in their original Spanish in the *Archivo de Indias* in Seville, Spain. Of the chosen letters two each were written by men to men, by women to men, by men to women, and by women to women.

These letters are neither all-encompassing nor representational of every type of experience or pattern. Instead, they were chosen randomly, maintaining the gendered diversity, in order to form a type of series of snapshots of different moments, locations, and people. Through a close analysis of the discussion of marriage in these letters, I argue that the transatlantic Spanish discourse around marriage is informed by not only the gender of the letter writer, but also their other identities such as class, status, education, and the gender and identity of the letter recipient as well. This intersectional analysis will serve to complicate simplistic and monolithic narratives of the feminine role and the

migrant experience, showing that migrants in the 1500s operated within a complex web of conflicting and intersecting worldviews and identities.

In order to show the complexity and uniqueness of these missives, I will first work to situate them in their particular context. I will give a very brief background on the Spanish Empire, followed by a discussion of migration patterns during the sixteenth century, and continuing with an overview of the nuances of ever-changing peninsular marriage practices during this time. At this point, I will dive into each of the eight letters, starting with the most common or “boilerplate” and continuing into the less common.¹⁸⁸ Within each letter I will cover general themes, unique characteristics, discussions of marriage, and the ways in which the identities of both the author and the recipients shape the narratives presented.

Migration

Migration from Spain to the New World had been already occurring for a number of decades before the reign of Philip II from 1556 to 1598.¹⁸⁹ However, Philip’s reign brought about a new national policy regarding management of colonies that had a serious impact on migration patterns. Philip’s focus on the Americas can be summarized in what is called his *decálogo* or Ten Commandments. These areas of focus included: mapping the Americas, creating a highly centralized bureaucracy and specific penal codes, defending coastal cities from pirates, exploiting natural resources such as silver, reorganizing indigenous systems of power and labor, instituting Catholicism, and, most

¹⁸⁸ For a chart outlining each of the letter numbers, authors, locations, years, and identities, see Appendix A.

¹⁸⁹ Ramón María Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo: (1517-1700)* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 2013), 102.

importantly for this chapter, the idea of *conquistar es poblar*—the act of conquering through populating.¹⁹⁰ This concept was first elaborated in minute detail in the “Ordenanzas del Bosque de Segovia” in 1573. In this document, Philip laid out all the requirements for conquering and pacifying native populations as well as precise standards for creating settlements and cities. These cities were to be filled with *vecinos*, a specific classification of married, property-owning men of Spanish descent. Marta Milagros del Vas Mingo notes that using the term *poblar* is merely the Crown’s attempt to sugarcoat the fact that populating a land is another, albeit less violent, method of conquest.¹⁹¹ Still, the legal and formal basis for migration from Spain to the New World was cemented. The Crown had given its explicit encouragement to the passenger ships that regularly set out across the Atlantic.

The officially approved route from Spain to the Americas was a very specific one. While it is undeniable that a good number of people and ships travelled illegally to the Americas outside of this approved route, it is necessary to understand the official legal framework through which these letters travelled. The official *flota de indias* only crossed the ocean twice a year, in January or August, depending on the destination, and was only permitted to stop in certain ports under the Spanish monopoly system. This meant that any ships going to the viceroyalty of *Nueva España*, modern Mexico, could only unload in Veracruz, while ships headed to *Tierra Firme*, modern Panama, could stop in Cartagena and Nombre de Dios (later Portobello). In the Antilles, only La Habana,

¹⁹⁰ Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo*, 104.

¹⁹¹ Marta Milagros del Vas Mingo, “Las Ordenanzas de 1573, sus antecedentes y consecuencias” *Quinto centenario* 8 (1985): 98.

Santiago, and Santo Domingo were acceptable stopping spots. These were the only cities authorized for trade by the Spanish crown during the length of Philip II's reign. On the way back to Europe, the fleet had to stop in Seville, the port through which all goods and people from the Americas had to pass.¹⁹² This created something of a hierarchy of ports with Seville as the most significant and powerful city.

Seville's position as the locus of travel and commerce between the far-flung portions of the Spanish Empire created a great deal of centralization of power in this southern city. One of the key institutions that embodied this control was the *Casa de la Contratación*, or House of Trade, through which all official and sanctioned flows of goods and people had to pass. Among other responsibilities, the Casa de la Contratación was responsible for issuing all *licencias* (travel licenses or permits) to the Americas. Unlike other nation states, who allowed for the flows of "riffraff," the most undesirable groups of their population, to their far-flung colonies, Spain was highly selective.¹⁹³ The Casa de la Contratación only issued travel licenses to "citizens of Castilian Christian blood."¹⁹⁴ Among those denied access to a new life in the New World were the Moors, of which there was still a large population from centuries of Arabic rule, Jews, the Romani (called *gitanos* or gypsies), and the "heretics." Later in the century, even any recently converted Christians were forbidden from travel.¹⁹⁵ This left the model emigrant as an honorable *cristiano viejo* (old Christian), who initially could only be male.

¹⁹² Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo*, 165-169.

¹⁹³ J.H. Elliott, *Spain and its World, 1500-1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 10.

¹⁹⁴ Jocelyn Hunt, *Spain, 1474-1598* (London: Routledge, 2001), 89.

¹⁹⁵ Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo*, 113-114.

Not only did the number of migrants to the Americas increase dramatically over the course of the century, so too did the proportion of women within these immigrant groups. Between 1509 and 1534, about 7,600 legal emigrants set sail from Seville, while between 1540 and 1579, this number had increased to 26,000.¹⁹⁶ While this does not take into account anyone who travelled illegally, either by sneaking on board or bribing a corrupt official, this does give a good approximation of the number of people who were able to obtain travel licenses and the funds necessary to make the move.

Over the course of the century, the composition of immigrants also changed. The typical narrative of the conquest highlights the largely male character of migration, with little thought to the women who also made the journey. While it is true that the initial wave of conquest was comprised of nearly all men, women slowly began to make up more and more of the passengers to the New World. While it is impossible to know the exact numbers of women who migrated, estimates based on licenses issued put women at 10% of travelers from 1509 and 1538, and 23% between 1540 and 1575.¹⁹⁷ By the end of the century, women comprised nearly a third of all emigrants from the Iberian peninsula.¹⁹⁸ Peter Boyd-Bowman's in-depth study of passengers lists and issued licenses demonstrates that of these women, only between 30 and 45.6 percent were married or widowed while the remaining 54.4 to 70 percent were unmarried.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo*, 116. While these time periods are not of equal length, the rate per year increases significantly from 304 immigrants a year in the first to around 667 per year in the second.

¹⁹⁷ Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo*, 117.

¹⁹⁸ Elliott, *Spain and its World*, 11.

¹⁹⁹ Peter Boyd-Bowman, "Patterns of Spanish Emigration to the Indies Until 1600," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 56, no. 4 (Nov., 1976): 596-601.

One of the best resources available for recognizing the motivations of these women migrants, their hopes and desires, is through letters. The Archivo General de Indias is located in the center of Seville, in the same place as the ancient Casa de la Contratación. It serves as a repository for all the records still available from the colonial era, from shipping records to passenger lists to orders from the Council of the Indies. Amongst all its boxes sits collection of letters written from migrants living in the Americas to their relatives or associates in the Peninsula. These letters found their way into the archive through applications for *licencias* by hopeful potential migrants. All these letters were collected, typed, and published by Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi in their *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias*. The letters compiled here represent a wide range of identities, goals, physical locations, experiences, and genders. Of the 650 letters in this collection, there are 529 different writers represented, 51 of which are women. The majority of the letters are from the viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico) and are written between 1571 and 1594.²⁰⁰

This compilation is an extremely valuable resource. Several scholars have already analyzed its content in a several ways. Pilar García Mouton, for example, scoured the entire collection for its humorous moments. These include instances such as when a mother and daughter lament the longevity of the daughter's aged husband who had not died nearly as quickly as they had been expecting, or when a husband fed up with waiting for his wife to join him threatens to run away to China.²⁰¹ Mariano Franco Figueroa also

²⁰⁰ Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616* (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988), 11.

²⁰¹ Pilar García Mouton, "Humor en las cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias (1540-1616)" *Cuadernos de CEMYR* (2004): 142, 143-144.

studied a set number of these letters in order to ascertain some of the linguistic features of these women migrants. As women are one of the primary transmitters of language through generations, this study also has interesting implications for the evolution of Spanish in the Americas.²⁰² Finally, Amelia Almorza Hidalgo chose to analyze the connections between the letters in the Archivo and sibling relationships. She found that, for a good many women, familial relationships, and above all, close sibling ties, provided the means and incentives to immigrate from Spain.²⁰³ Just as Almorza Hidalgo chose to analyze a single thread running through the corpus of letters, so too I will trace the thread of marriage ties through eight randomly-chosen letters from this volume, examining the intersections between matrimony and migration.

Marriage

The institution of matrimony underwent massive changes in Catholic Spain throughout the course of the sixteenth century. In the beginning of the 1500s, marriage practices in Spain were anything but standardized. Traditionally, marriage consisted of two elements—a consensual promise between two people of the opposite sex to be married, and the sexual consummation of this promise.²⁰⁴ The blessing or presence of a priest was not required in order for a union to be recognized within the community and treated accordingly by the law. This practice, typically referred to as a “clandestine marriage” because of its private nature, was widespread throughout early modern Europe

²⁰² Mariano Franco Figueroa, “Cartas de mujeres en documentos americanos coloniales,” *Boletín de Filología* 46, no. 2 (June 2011): 59-84.

²⁰³ Amelia Almorza Hidalgo, “Sibling Relations in Spanish Emigration to Latin America, 1560-1620,” *European Review of History* 17, no. 5 (October 2010): 735-752.

²⁰⁴ Allyson M. Poska, *Regulating the People: The Catholic Reformation in Seventeenth-Century Spain*, vol. 5 of *Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern Peoples*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 101.

but was especially common in the Iberian Peninsula.²⁰⁵ As can be imagined, a secretive union without any witnesses came with a multitude of complications.

Chief amongst the possible problems was the potential for bigamy, a practice most assuredly not supported by the Catholic Church. Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook illustrate the complexities of this type of marriage in their book *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance: A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy*. Here a single conquistador, Francisco Noguero de Ulloa, supposedly believing his first wife dead, returned to Spain from Peru with his second wife in tow. Unfortunately for him, his first wife was still very much alive, which made his second marriage an illegal, sinful act.²⁰⁶ While the veracity of Francisco's truthfulness can be debated, his case does illuminate some of the challenges in marriage practices during a time where regular birth and death records, much less marital records, were a rarity.

For many couples, the act of bigamy was much less dramatic and well-known than in the case of Noguero de Ulloa. There could be a simple misunderstanding where one person in the pair believed that their sexual relations were consummating a marriage vow, while the other did not believe they were making such a commitment. There was always the additional danger that individuals, especially men, were faking a marriage promise in order to have extramarital sex. If they then went on to marry another woman, they could be committing bigamy.²⁰⁷ Of course, proving bigamy in a system that allowed

²⁰⁵ Jutta Sperling, "Marriage at the Time of the Council of Trent (1560-70): Clandestine Marriages, Kinship Prohibitions, and Dowry Exchange in European Comparison" *Journal of Early Modern History* 8, no. 1.2 (February 2004): 70.

²⁰⁶ Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook, *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance: A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

²⁰⁷ Poska, *Regulating the People*, 110.

for private marriage, and had no regulated documentation of said marriages, proved to be nearly impossible in almost all cases.²⁰⁸ This was especially frustrating for priests who were attempting to protect their flocks from sin. Without the ability to tell who was married, they were unable to tell who was straying from the ‘good’ path, and correct them accordingly.

Part of the mission of the Council of Trent, beyond forming a response to the rapidly growing Protestant movement, was to attempt to address some of the larger problems associated with marriage. The series of meetings that took place from 1545 to 1563 came up with several key reforms designed to curb clandestine marriages and their associated problems. One such solution was the decree *Tametsi* which required priests to bless and preside over all future marriages.²⁰⁹ They also implemented the use of *banns*, which forced marriage rites from the private to the public, where it could be verified by community members. Finally, the Church supported a marriage system consisting of three parts: *palabras del futuro* as a continuation of the private betrothal, *palabras del presente* as the public marriage vow, and finally the sexual (and supposedly virginal) consummation.²¹⁰ In this way, the Church was hoping to connect local traditions with new ecclesiastical practices, and bring the entire matrimonial system under church purview.

Of course, behaviors do not change nearly as quickly as policies do. Historian Allyson Poska sums this up with the succinct observation that the “Church’s ability to

²⁰⁸ Richard E Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists: Marriage, Family, and Community in Colonial Mexico*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 62-65.

²⁰⁹ Michael A Mullett, *The Catholic Reformation*, (London: Routledge, 2002), ix, 65.

²¹⁰ Poska, *Regulating the People*, 113, 102.

impose this conformity on its parishioners was constrained by one significant obstacle: the parishioners themselves.”²¹¹ The numbers of illegitimate births throughout the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are evidence enough of people’s unwillingness to confine themselves to the new stricter matrimonial standards.²¹² Still, the Council of Trent did have an impact on how the Church framed marriage as an institution. Above all, its new standards functioned to frame the discourse of honor, legitimacy, and appropriate non-sinful behavior. This discourse would be carried by post-Trent emigrants to the New World—a group in which all of our letter-writers belong—and would impact their conceptions and discussion of appropriate marriages.

The second half of the sixteenth century was a time of great change in the Spanish Empire, beginning with a political shift from a phase of conquest into one of colonization. At the same time, a great influx of migration, especially feminine migration, was leading to a new type of travel, and for new purposes. All this was also occurring in an instance of great social change with new modifications in marriage law and transformations in the greater Catholic Church. These emigrant letters reflect the unique nature of this tumultuous historical period and the emigrants’ individual lives.

Las Cartas Privadas

Carta 643: “The greatest pain I have is not having you with me”

Of all the letters I have chosen, Carta 643 is the most typical in form and content. In the whole compilation, 105 of the 650 letters are between spouses, typically from

²¹¹ Poska, *Regulating the People*, 103.

²¹² Poska, *Regulating the People*, 108.

husbands to wives, asking them to travel over to the Americas.²¹³ Diego de Navarrete, writing to his wife Catalina Gutiérrez, is no different. He begins the letter with a salutation to the “wife of my heart” and continues on to describe how much he misses her.²¹⁴ His flowery language and dramatic prose is very standard for a spousal letter as he asserts that he loves her always and “for all the days of my life until I die” and that “the greatest pain I have is not having you with me... because I neither eat nor sleep when I am not with you.”²¹⁵ His flair and drama may have been a part of his romanticization of their relationship. After all, with ships departing rarely, the two would be able to exchange letters twice a year at most. This was, of course, assuming that nothing happened to the letter in transit, the addressee received the letter, they desired to reply, and that they received it with enough time to respond before the ships left again. As can be imagined, letters frequently went astray and individuals could go years without hearing from their loved ones.

Interestingly, Diego de Navarrete hints at another reason for writing such elegant flattery to his wife. De Navarrete takes pains to assure her that “truly the women of Santo Domingo do not play a part, nor the *mulatas*, as they say here” because his love for her is so powerful.²¹⁶ Such an assertion seems unprovoked and almost arbitrary. What good would it do to mention other women, who are supposedly *not* a part of his life, in a letter

²¹³ Otte and Albi, *Cartas privadas*, 11.

²¹⁴ “Mujer mía de mi corazón,” Diego de Navarrete to Catalina Gutiérrez (May 26, 1583), Carta 643 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes de Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 576. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

²¹⁵ “tendré todos los días de mi vida hasta que me muera” and “el mayor dolor que tengo es no teneros conmigo... porque no como ni duermo que no es con vos,” de Navarrete, Carta 643: 576.

²¹⁶ “cierto que no son parte las damas de Santo Domingo, ni las mulatas, como por acá se dicen,” de Navarrete, Carta 643: 576.

to his wife? García Mouton hypothesizes in this particular case that de Navarrete was rebutting the claims made by his wife in a previous letter.²¹⁷ It is not hard to envision that Catalina, thousands of miles away in Triana, a neighborhood of Seville, would have suspected her husband of betraying her. She only had his word, if that, to depend on, as well as any money he chose to send as support.

Truthfully, the odds of bigamy, or at least infidelity, occurring were fairly high. Santo Domingo, as one of the first colonies created by the Spanish in the early 1490s, had a long history of intermarriages with indigenous and mestiza women. In 1530, the bishop of Santo Domingo complained of the difficulty of determining if men were indeed living with mistresses, or if the indigenous women in their houses were simply servants.²¹⁸ This distinction between mistress and servant, or between mistress and secondary wife, may not have been clear even to the indigenous women themselves, making it even more difficult for clergy to neatly categorize the relationships of their parishioners. This complaint would be echoed in the reforms of the Council of Trent, and in the lived experiences of the women left behind. Catalina Gutiérrez, from her home in Spain, would have had no assurance of her husband's fidelity, and doubtless this sense of powerlessness bled through in her communications with him.

The separation of married couples was not ideal for building a well-integrated and adjusted society. This had been recognized almost from the first moments of conquest. During the first few decades of the 1500s, the Crown encouraged the migration of

²¹⁷ García Mouton, "Humor en las cartas," 145.

²¹⁸ Ida Altman, "Spanish women in the Caribbean, 1493-1540," *Women of the Iberian Atlantic* (2012): 59-60.

married couples, or the rejoining of spouses left behind to their overseas counterpart. It was believed that wives exerted a stabilizing effect on their husbands that would be conducive to creating “civilized” colonies. This was, of course, a racialized assumption presuming that the wives in question were Spanish, or at least had been raised in the Spanish style, as mestizas such as Francisca Pizarro were.²¹⁹ By the mid-1500s, this general policy became law. Now, it became “illegal for a married man to emigrate without his wife or to remain in the colonies without sending for her.”²²⁰ Was this why Diego de Navarrete was sending for the “lady of [his] soul” to come to him?²²¹

Laws insisting that a wife travel to live with her husband had the interesting effect of flipping the power relations. When previously it was entirely the choice of de Navarrete to write to his wife, send her money, or send her the invitation that would allow her to apply for a *licencia*, he held the majority of the control in their relationship. As soon as he had to rely on her to travel to him, however, the script was flipped. While de Navarrete could potentially be shipped back to Spain for his failure to bring Catalina to Santo Domingo, no authority in Spain would force Catalina to travel to him. In an attempt to appeal to Catalina, Diego makes a concerted effort to downplay any potential negatives, such as the fact that “in these lands women are very costly.”²²² Instead, he sends her a gift of “a very charming parakeet” that “slept with him like a child.”²²³ While this could have simply been a gift of affection to Catalina out of pure affection, his

²¹⁹ Altman, “Spanish women in the Caribbean,” 60-61.

²²⁰ Boyd-Bowman, “Patterns of Spanish Emigration,” 583.

²²¹ “señora de mi alma,” de Navarrete, Carta 643: 577.

²²² “en estas tierras son muy costosas, las mujeres,” de Navarrete, Carta 643: 576.

²²³ “un periquito muy salado,” “duerme conmigo como un niño,” de Navarrete, Carta 643: 577.

assertion that “because you have to come I will not send you anything more” shows that her travelling was still his ultimate goal and expected outcome.²²⁴ In this moment, the control to migrate or stay was entirely in her hands. Fortunately for Diego, the presence of this letter in the Archivo de Indias means that Catalina did at the very least apply for a licencia to begin her own migratory journey.

Carta 378: “I am the lady of vassals”

Another letter that conforms well with the typical immigrant narrative is Carta 378, written from Catalina Alvarez to her brother, García Martín, in 1565 from the New Kingdom of Granada within the viceroyalty of Peru. Alvarez frames her own narrative as that of an average woman who, after successfully marrying a conquistador, finds herself wealthy and powerful. This was a powerful narrative because, as Carlos B. Vega notes, “women also emigrated in order to... improve their social and economic condition by means of marriage with one of those famous and supposedly rich conquistadors, an objective that in the long run few reached.”²²⁵ Catalina Alvarez was one of those few who did manage to fulfill that dream. She tells her brother that “I am married to a conquistador and settler of these provinces, and he has three of his own towns, and I am the lady of vassals.”²²⁶ Narratives like Alvarez’s encouraged other single or widowed Spanish women to attempt to achieve the same social ladder climbing.

²²⁴ “porque habéis de venir no os envío más,” de Navarrete, Carta 643: 577.

²²⁵ “También emigraban estas mujeres para... mejorar su condición social y económica mediante casamiento con uno de los afamados y supuestamente ricos conquistadores, objetivo que a la larga muy pocas alcanzaron,” Carlos B. Vega, *Conquistadoras: Mujeres Heroicas de la Conquista de América*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2003), 52.

²²⁶ “estoy casada con un conquistador y poblador de estas provincias, y tiene tres pueblos suyos, y soy señora de vasallos,” Catalina Alvarez to García Martín (June 1, 1565), Carta 378 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 334.

The system Alvarez was referencing here was the *encomienda* system in which parcels of land were given to conquistadors as rewards. Significantly, *encomenderos* (the holder of the *encomienda*) did not technically own the land, but instead received tribute and labor from the indigenous peoples who lived there.²²⁷ Therefore, when Alvarez refers to the three towns owned by her new husband, she is referencing the size of his *encomienda*. Similarly, her mention of “vassals” was a boast about the number of indigenous people who gave tribute to her family. Though the *encomienda* system was popular in the first few decades of the conquest, it was opposed almost from the beginning by the Crown, and was officially outlawed in 1542. The slow translation from law to practice, however, meant that even two decades later, Spaniards in the more regulated Viceroyalty of New Spain (Mexico) were still benefitting from this exploitative system.²²⁸ It is logical then, that when Catalina Alvarez wrote her letter in 1565, she and her husband would still have been benefitting from this system, though it was on the decline.

Reading Alvarez’s letter in relation with the stories of indigenous women such as Quispe Sisa and Malintzin makes clear some of the ironies of her narrative. Her possession of this land was possible, only because of the displacement of indigenous peoples, and particularly indigenous women. In fact, it is entirely possible that her husband had first married an elite indigenous woman, and upon her death, retained the property. While this is entirely conjecture, we know that this same pattern happened

²²⁷ Karen Vieira Powers, *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 3.

²²⁸ Hanns J. Prem, “Spanish Colonization and Indian Property in Central Mexico, 1521-1620,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992): 445-446.

many times over. Both Malintzin, Cuxirimay, and Francisca Pizarro's properties eventually ended up in the hands of their husbands and his descendants, transitioning out of indigenous or mestiza control and into the hands of Spaniards. Regardless, Alvarez does not find it necessary to discuss how her husband earned the encomienda, but instead focuses on her own story.

Catalina Alvarez frames her story as a largely successful one. Above all, she has been fortunate in her marital life as "God has worked to give me his goods, and give me a husband such that in all these lands there is not a woman better married."²²⁹ Here her bragging is masked with humility. She couches her circumstances as particularly advantageous and positive with all the wealth and acclaim that she could want, but demurs that everything was given her by God, rather than her own doing. Such feigned humility keeps her speech within acceptable parameters for her gender, yet allows her to claim a certain amount of superiority over both the other women who did not manage to claim such wealthy spouses, and even her own brother who, living in the north of Spain, is not able possess some of the wealth of the Americas. By framing her situation in this way, she is also able to blame God for the parts of her life that have not gone smoothly. In the same sentence in which she states that God has given her a marvelous husband, she also states that "with all this God has not worked to give me children from this husband."²³⁰ Her lack of a child from this union, rather being the fault of Alvarez herself

²²⁹ "Ha sido Dios servido de darme de sus bienes, y darme un marido que en todas estas tierras no hay mujer mejor casada," Alvarez, Carta 378: 334.

²³⁰ "con todo esto no ha sido Dios servido de darme hijos de este marido," Alvarez, Carta 378: 334.

or her husband, was instead the work of God, and not any sign of her failing as a wife and mother.

At this point, her narrative begins to differ from the typical. While it was extremely common for men to write to their male relatives to travel as their heirs to the New World (letters from uncles to nephews are the second most common in the Archivo after letters from husbands to wives), it was rare for a woman to do so.²³¹ Yet this is exactly what Catalina Alvarez does. Her new husband, it appears, has no family to inherit and so anyone she produces as heir will be considered just as proper as anyone of his familial line. Catalina's summoning of her heir, however, is significantly more roundabout than is typical. She begins by requesting that her brother send her the son that she gave birth to from her *entrañas*.²³² The use of the word *entrañas* is particularly interesting as it signifies both insides, literally as in entrails, and heart, figuratively as in conscience and feelings. She thus establishes her biological link to him, but in a way that also reflects their supposed emotional connection.

Alvarez goes on to clarify that this son, both of her body and heart, is an appropriate heir through a discussion of legitimacy. She lists her own pedigree by stating that she, "your sister Catalina Alvarez," is the "daughter of Juan Sánchez de Luchena and of Mari Alvarez, his legitimate wife" and that she had been "married and veiled with Juan Muñoz de Berlanga, as commands the Holy Church" and from this union, conceived her

²³¹ Otte and Albi, *Cartas privadas*, 11.

²³² "si un hijo que yo de mis entrañas parí es vivo," Alvarez, Carta 378: 334.

son, Juan.²³³ Through her carefully chosen phrasing, Catalina is speaking within a discourse of legitimacy that most men did not have to partake in. This discourse of legitimacy was often more complex than expected because the Catholic Church recognized varying degrees of illegitimacy depending on parental sin. Therefore, Grace Coolidge explains, this conversation often involved “both parents and children work[ing] hard to prove that they were either the best kind of illegitimate or, better yet, actually legitimate because of legal technicalities, misunderstandings, or timing.”²³⁴ Alvarez takes pains to sidestep any talk of scandal by establishing not only her son as a child born inside wedlock, but also her own positionality as the daughter of a licit union. She works to situate herself in this moral landscape through a kind of double insurance of legitimacy, thereby rebutting any potential arguments against the suitability of taking her son by another marriage as heir of her new marriage.

Interestingly, Catalina Alvarez does not appear to have raised this son herself. She claims that she does not know “where or how he grew up” but that “one of my brothers has to know of him.”²³⁵ Perhaps she had left him with family in Spain, intending to send for him after being safely settled in the Americas. It could also be that Catalina’s first husband died, divorce not being regularly permitted, and so young Juan was raised by his father’s family as Catalina went on to seek a new life. It is also possible, given Catalina’s defensiveness about his legitimacy, that Juan was not actually conceived in wedlock, and

²³³ “vuestra hermana Catalina Alvarez,” “hija de Juan Sánchez de Luchena y de Mari Alvarez, su legítima mujer,” “fui de Juan Muñoz de Berlanga casada y velada, como lo manda la santa madre iglesia,” Alvarez, Carta 378: 334.

²³⁴ Grace Coolidge, “A Vile and Abject Woman: Noble Mistresses, Legal Power, and the Family in Early Modern Spain,” *Journal of Family History* 32, no. 3 (2007): 196.

²³⁵ “dónde ni cómo se crió,” “alguno de mis hermanos no pueden dejar de saber de él” Alvarez, Carta 378: 334.

so was raised by relatives to avoid disgrace. Whatever the situation, Catalina Alvarez and her new husband have “no one to leave [their possessions] to except to him.”²³⁶ Her position as the wife of an encomendero allows her to gloss over any potential failings that could be attributed to her fulfillment of the motherly role and sidestep questions of Juan’s legitimacy as their heir. Just as with de Navarrete’s wife, we can assume by this letter’s presence in the archive that Juan at least attempted to make his way to the New World. Whether or not he was able to use this dubious familial link to improve his own fortunes remains uncertain.

Carta 359: “I have married a widowed lady, beautiful, distinguished, and rich”

As it is, the narrative of “marrying up” did not always mirror Catalina Alvarez’s story of the uniting of a relatively poor woman with a wealthy conquistador or encomendero. The narrative sometimes went the other way as well, with a property-less man marrying either an *heredera* (heiress) or wealthy *viuda* (widow). This was the case of Juan de Camargo who wrote to Juan de Camargo Sanabria (shortened to Sanabria to differentiate the two men) from Tamalameque, also in the New Kingdom of Granada, in 1573. Just like Alvarez, de Camargo begins his own self-narrative with a boast about his new position. He starts by informing Sanabria that “I have married a widowed lady, beautiful, distinguished, and rich,” named Doña Catalina de Aranda.²³⁷ His “rich widow” does not appear very different from Alvarez’s conquistador in terms of wealth and status

²³⁶ “no tengo a quien lo dejar sino es a él,” Alvarez, Carta 378: 334.

²³⁷ “me he casado con una señora viuda, hermosa, principal y rica.” Juan de Camargo to Juan de Camargo Sanabria (April 17, 1573), Carta 359 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 313.

earned from the union. However, this conferring of status is just about where the similarities end.

Unlike Alvarez, de Camargo does not bother playing into discourses of legitimacy, or feigning humility. He forgoes any mention of God, and instead places himself at the center of his narrative. Where Alvarez noted her luck in finding such a good husband, de Camargo comments that his wife, beyond being pleasing to him, “gifts me a lot.”²³⁸ This difference in perspective is hardly unexpected given the nature of a marriage predicated on patriarchy that automatically placed men in positions of dominance over women.²³⁹ Juan de Camargo would have had no reason to de-center himself in his own letter. Unlike Alvarez, who conforms to feminine standards of religiosity and decency, de Camargo can be more forthright and blunt in his goals, safe in the assurance that his desires are foremost and uncontested.

Indeed, straightforwardness characterizes the rest of de Camargo’s missive. He tells Sanabria that his new wife “has a daughter of twelve years, named Doña María, and she has five thousand golden pesos.”²⁴⁰ This is important to de Camargo because he has his wife’s “given word to marry her [the daughter] with Juan de Camargo, my oldest son, when he arrives to this city.”²⁴¹ Similarly to the Inca and mestiza women in the previous chapter, propertied women were often too valuable economically for their families to neglect to secure a profitable marriage very early on. Juan de Camargo orders Sanabria to

²³⁸ “me regala mucho,” de Camargo, Carta 359: 313.

²³⁹ Richard Boyer, “Women, *La Mala Vida*, and the Politics of Marriage,” in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrín (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 252-253.

²⁴⁰ “Tiene una hija de doce años, llámase doña María, y tiene cinco mil pesos de oro,” de Camargo, Carta 359: 313.

²⁴¹ “dada palabra de casarla con Juan de Camargo, mi hijo mayor, luego que llegue a esta ciudad,” de Camargo, Carta 359: 313.

send his son to him as quickly as possible, along with all his other children, so that they can gain from his new connections, and profit through marriages, as he did. Interestingly, he explains that his children will not inherit all of Doña Catalina de Aranda's property as she has nephews who are next in line. In this way, his influence is limited more than Alvarez's as her son was set to inherit everything.

De Camargo is also more forthright than Alvarez when it comes to recognizing his material gains. Alvarez does mention having vassals and towns under her control, but stops short of mentioning any more specific wealth. Juan de Camargo has no such compunctions. He has no shame in admitting that part of his wife's attraction is her generosity with her wealth and outlining exactly how many pesos he and her nephews all have. This difference can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that Catalina Alvarez would have had little control over or access to her husband's funds compared to Juan de Camargo. Also important here is Alvarez's focus on spirituality and de Camargo's on materiality. While they both attempted similar goals, the immigration of their sons, de Camargo as a man had an easier job of issuing that command and did not have to navigate the same kind of rhetorical gymnastics as did Alvarez.

Carta 112: "My niece has married a man so distinguished"

An interesting contrast to the desires of Juan de Camargo is Doña Leonor de Aguilera. She wrote to her nephew, Francisco de Castillo, in 1591 from Mexico in order to suggest that he send some of her nieces over to her. Unlike de Camargo or Alvarez, she makes no promise of inheritance, though she does say that anyone who makes it over

to the Americas will be put “on our bill.”²⁴² Although she claims interest in all of her nieces,²⁴³ she takes notice of one in particular proclaiming with happiness that “my niece has married a man so distinguished.”²⁴⁴ She continues to show interest in her married niece, stating a preference for the married daughter being in charge of funds and stating that above all she wants to see her “niece and her children.”²⁴⁵ This preference for the married niece can be read in several different ways. If Doña Leonor is looking for a male relative to help handle her affairs, she may view her niece’s new husband as the ideal candidate to do so. There is also the added bonus of not needing to secure a chaperone for her niece, an extremely arduous and dangerous process, as her husband would be able to fulfill that role.²⁴⁶ Additionally, a married couple would be less of a strain on her financial resources (provided the husband is willing to work) than a single woman without an inheritance.

Rather than the promise of wealth and riches, Doña Leonor makes several strategic appeals to get her nephew to do as she requests. The first is an appeal regarding her old age as she hopes to see him (and his married daughter, of course) one more time “before [she] die[s].”²⁴⁷ This works both as an appeal to sentiment and an impetus to get him to move quickly as the time frame for visiting Doña Leonor, and benefitting from her

²⁴² “por nuestra cuenta,” Doña Leonor de Aguilera (July 15, 1591), Carta 112 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 121-122.

²⁴³ I am using “niece” to describe this relation as that is the word used by Doña Leonor. A more accurate term would be “grandnieces” as they are the daughters of her nephew, but the distinction is not always made in Spanish and is not terribly important to this analysis.

²⁴⁴ “el contento que tiene de haber casado a mi sobrina con un hombre tan principal,” de Aguilera, Carta 112: 121.

²⁴⁵ “quería ver a mi sobrina y sus hijos,” de Aguilera, Carta 112: 122.

²⁴⁶ Almorza Hidalgo, “Sibling Relations in Spanish Emigration,” 742.

²⁴⁷ “antes que me muriese,” de Aguilera, Carta 112: 122.

generosity, is rapidly closing. The second is a pragmatic argument. Doña Leonor makes the blunt observation that “you have one married and four unmarried daughters, and a son. That seems to me a lot of children to accommodate in the comforts... of Spain.”²⁴⁸ This statement is offered with all the straightforwardness that was permissible coming from a woman who is not only of the upper class, indicated by the honorific “doña,” but also an older woman in the same family.

The differences between the speech of Catalina Alvarez, who for all her good fortune was not a doña, and Doña Leonor could thus be partly explained by their differing ages and statuses. In this case it was not gender, but social standing, that marked difference. Similarly, the parallels between the tones of de Camargo and Doña Leonor cannot be explained solely through an explanation of gender. De Camargo’s gender allowed for his forthrightness while Doña Leonor took advantage of her age, family position, and social standing. In this way, they were elevated to a similar plane and were able to request some of the same things using comparable tones, despite the differences in their gender identities.

Carta 283: “She who is the daughter of an honorable man can marry honorably”

Amelia Almorza Hidalgo, when discussing *sobrinismo*, or the phenomenon of requesting that nephews join their uncles (or aunts), observes that typically “the nephew... is thus not directly invited; instead, the father or mother is asked to have the child sent.”²⁴⁹ This phenomenon could just as easily refer to the calling for nieces through

²⁴⁸ “tiene una hija casada y cuatro por casar, y un hijo. Parécenme muchos hijos para acomodarlos con los cómodos... de España,” de Aguilera, Carta 112: 121.

²⁴⁹ Almorza Hidalgo, “Sibling Relations in Spanish Emigration,” 740.

their parents. Doña Leonor, with her missive to her nephew, was an example of this trend. So too was Carta 283 from Hernando Gutiérrez to his son Alonso García Velázquez (who also worked as his lawyer) in 1583 from Panama. This letter, in addition to being exceedingly lengthy and full of a myriad of details regarding the minutiae of applying for a *licencia* and travel advice, touched upon the theme of prospects for García Velázquez's daughters.

Hernando Gutiérrez, assures his son that he is well off, if ill of health. In his missive, he seems uncertain of the number of daughters his son has, stating that “it seems to me that you have two daughters, if not three.”²⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Gutiérrez promises his son that, beyond his excellent business opportunities, there will be plenty of options for his daughters to advance easily. After all, with good luck, “you can get her [a daughter] married or into religion as she wishes with a thousand ducats.”²⁵¹ It is worth nothing that, although Gutiérrez never mentions the type of man his granddaughters should marry, there can be no question that he is referring to a man of Spanish descent. Even in the first moments of conquest, Spanish/indigenous marriages were also coded Spanish/male and indigenous/female, and never the reverse. Gutiérrez's focus on the desires of the daughter only go as far as these two potential options—to become a wife or a nun. Gutiérrez instead is much more interested in the financial part of the transaction. He also makes sure to note that, if the wedding is the chosen option, it can end up costing more than two thousand ducats. His focus on the fiscal is not surprising given the purpose and primary

²⁵⁰ “me parece que de dos hijas que tenéis, si no son tres,” Hernando Gutiérrez to Alonso García Velázquez (April 6, 1583), Carta 283 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 254.

²⁵¹ “la podéis casar o meter en religión como ella lo quisiere, con mil ducados,” Gutiérrez, Carta 283: 255.

message of his letter overall. Still, it is noteworthy that the daughters, indeed women in general, are given hardly two lines in one of the lengthiest letters in the entire collection, at nearly three full typed pages.

Gutiérrez's emphasis is clearly placed on men and men's experiences. Even when discussing the hypothetical marriage of García Velázquez's daughters, the focus remains on men as he says that "she who is the daughter of an honorable man can marry honorably."²⁵² By putting the focus on the position of the father as the important factor in arranging a profitable marriage, Gutiérrez is centering himself and his son in the discussion. While it is frustrating for the historian attempting a gendered analysis, this narrow vision is logical. Gutiérrez is a man writing to another man. Just as Juan de Camargo would have logically positioned his own experiences as more central than anyone else's, so too would a late sixteenth century man have had little reason or incentive to elaborate on the position of women. It is noteworthy that in both of these cases, the letters were written both by men and for men, and thus reflect a certain male experience only peripherally concerned with the feminine.

Carta 216: "Marry chiefly with a man that makes you happy and honored"

In contrast to Gutiérrez and de Camargo, Francisco Ramírez Bravo spends a good portion of his letter focusing on the desires and needs of women. In 1582, Ramírez Bravo writes to his daughter, Doña Isabel Bravo, from Nochtepec in the viceroyalty of New Spain, asking her to join him in the New World. He begins the letter with the simple salutation of "beloved daughter" and then continues on to tell her that he is sickly so she

²⁵² "la que es hija de hombre honrado para casarla honradamente," Gutiérrez, Carta 283: 255.

should travel with haste.²⁵³ He is so emphatic in his wish for her to join him that he claims that with “under penalty of my curse, you will not have a father and I no one to call daughter” if she does not hurry to him.²⁵⁴ Whether this curse is merely his poor health or a hex of his own design is unclear, but either way his drama is clearly intended to either scare or guilt her into traveling. He continues using guilt as a motivating factor by insisting that “as a father I desire this for your own good.”²⁵⁵ This high-handed approach, not terribly different from that of Doña Leonor, calls upon a certain level of familial duty, especially regarding the responsibility of youth to their elders.

Ramírez Bravo does not waste too much time lingering over familial responsibility, however. He quickly switches to a much more bribe-oriented tact, telling Doña Isabel that in the Americas “you have a house and hacienda that I have bought for you... where you will find black men and women who serve you, where you will have all the rest that you want.”²⁵⁶ He starts out with the material, reassuring his daughter that he can and will provide for her. He even gives the price of all this property at 12,500 pesos, a significant sum. All of this is hers to inherit, because, as Ramírez Bravo states, “all that I have, that at present is a lot... all will be for you and for the children that God gives

²⁵³ “amada hija,” Francisco Ramírez Bravo to Doña Isabel Bravo (March 8, 1582), Carta 216 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 194.

²⁵⁴ “so pena de mi maldición, y que en mí no tendrás padre, y ni yo te llamaré hija,” Ramírez Bravo, Carta 216: 194.

²⁵⁵ “como padre que desea tu bien,” Ramírez Bravo, Carta 216: 194.

²⁵⁶ “donde tienes casa y hacienda que yo he comprado para ti...en donde hallarás negros y negras que te sirvan, donde tendrás todo el descanso que quisieres,” Ramírez Bravo, Carta 216: 194-195.

you.”²⁵⁷ In this way, Doña Isabel is named the heiress of her father’s fortune, with the assumption that she will marry and have children.

Once again, Ramírez Bravo assures Doña Isabel that she will find an easy life in the Americas in this matter as well. He informs her that “here you will be more esteemed and honored than in that land [Spain], because it will be enough that you are my daughter.”²⁵⁸ More than having her future secured in material ways, she will also be accepted, and even esteemed, socially. Just like Gutiérrez, Ramírez Bravo notes the importance of the father in the status and esteem given to his daughters. Rather than noting anything she can do to raise her own reputation, or indeed reduce it, she is seen as a member of the family before being seen as an individual. Viewing the family as a unit with its own reputation and honor came to be a significant marker of colonial society in the beginning of the seventeenth century with the rise of big haciendas and an elite set of families with highly consolidated power.²⁵⁹

For Doña Isabel, this type of family reputation would make it easier for her to find a husband. Indeed, her father insists that having both land and a respected father means that she would be able to “marry chiefly with a man that makes you happy and honored, and whatever you want.”²⁶⁰ Ramírez Bravo is giving his daughter much more latitude in choosing her own partner than other fathers and heads of households previously mentioned. This change in register, from imperious and demanding to more

²⁵⁷ “todo lo que yo tengo, que al presente es mucho...todo ha de ser para ti y para los hijos que Dios te diere,” Ramírez Bravo, Carta 216: 195.

²⁵⁸ “acá serás más estimada y más honrada que en esa tierra, porque basta que seas mi hija,” Ramírez Bravo, Carta 216: 195.

²⁵⁹ Serrera, *La América de los Habsburgo*, 257-269.

²⁶⁰ “te casarás principalmente con hombre que tengas contento y honra, y cuanto tu quisieres,” Ramírez Bravo, Carta 216: 195.

accommodating and pleading, can be attributed at least in part by the shift in power here. Just as Diego de Navarrete, the traditional head of household who had to request rather than demand when talking to his wife, so too does Ramírez Bravo have to make sure to really appeal to his daughter. In both these cases of men writing to women, the woman in question has the option to travel or not. She can choose to stay in Spain separate from her family, and there is little that her distant relatives can force her to do about it. Fortunately for both de Navarrete and Ramírez Bravo, their offer was tempting enough that their respective addressees at least attempted to get the paperwork necessary to join them.

Carta 553: “Here women without a husband are not worth anything”

Unlike the majority of the letters in this collection, not everyone found such success in the New World. One such example of the hardships encountered is given by María Alonso. She writes to Juana Gutiérrez, whom she refers to as “my lady sister of my heart and soul,” from Cuzco in 1585.²⁶¹ From the beginning, she has very little but laments about her situation. She complains that she suffers terribly from “gout of the joints and chest that gives me a type of asthma” and also that her daughter has not risen from bed in nearly three months due to “very bad fevers and pain in one ear.”²⁶² All of this illness has made it hard for her to work, and so she presents her case to Juana as a poor woman, unable to cover her basic expenses. This is also where the plea comes in. She asks Juana to send her an extra hundred pesos “so that I can buy a black woman who

²⁶¹ “señora hermana de mi corazón y de mi alma,” María Alonso to Juana Gutiérrez (January 6, 1585), Carta 553 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 491.

²⁶² “gota artética y del pecho, que me da a manera de asma,” “muy grandes calenturas y dolor en un oído,” Alonso, Carta 553: 491.

could earn me something to eat.”²⁶³ Her problems, as she presents them, are largely economic, but could potentially be solved with another wage-earner in her household.

This frustration with her limited economic power and lack of choice culminates in her chief complaint in the letter. She gripes that “here women without a husband are not worth anything, they cannot even earn anything to eat, because here there isn’t [domestic] service.”²⁶⁴ In Spain, though the feminine ideal was a married woman who maintained the home, there was a large market for domestic help. In many cases, poor women worked as maids for a specific family from young adolescence through early adulthood in order to earn enough money for a dowry.²⁶⁵ In other cases, they worked throughout their marriages because “they had to work in order to survive.”²⁶⁶ This was the situation María Alonso had probably been expecting when she went to the New World. Whether she was widowed or had never been married, Alonso had the expectation that she would be able to work to support herself without a husband. Disappointed to find this was not the case, and with few other options at her disposal, she reached out to her family across the ocean.

María Alonso’s situation shows the great differences that socioeconomic class had on the outcomes of the lives of different Spanish women. Towards the end of the letter, she makes an offhand request for Juana to come to live with her in Cuzco as, “God is witness of how much I desire to see you.”²⁶⁷ However, unlike the other letter writers who promised to help financially with the travel, Alonso is unable to give such aid. Juana

²⁶³ “para que me compre una negra que me gane de comer,” Alonso, Carta 553: 491.

²⁶⁴ “acá las mujeres sin marido no valen nada, ni pueden ganar de comer, porque acá no hay servicio,” Alonso, Carta 553: 491.

²⁶⁵ Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 66.

²⁶⁶ Perry, *Gender and Disorder*, 178.

²⁶⁷ “Dios es testigo cuan tanto deseo tengo de veros,” Alonso, Carta 553: 491.

must provide her own travel funds, as well as the extra money that Alonso requested. Unlike Alvarez or Doña Leonor, Alonso did not have the funds or the stability necessary to guarantee any type of assistance with travel or assurance of material gain. This results in a centering of her own immediate needs, money to obtain another productive adult, over her emotional needs for family to alleviate her loneliness. Speaking of women's experiences as monolithic or uniform does not help explain the huge disparities between the requests and experiences of María Alonso when compared to wealthier women such as Catalina Alvarez and Doña Leonor. Only when other axes of identities are taken into account does a more nuanced vision of the women's lives begin to emerge.

Carta 138: To the “daughters of my soul”

The final letter, Carta 138, is from the wife of Domingo de Oria to her stepdaughters Inés Hernández and María Hernández, written from Mexico in 1603. The author begins by addressing the “daughters of my soul” and informing them of the luck she had in “having got it right with such a good husband” (she was, of course, referencing their father).²⁶⁸ She hints at having been widowed when she references her own daughter, saying that “God knows the sorrow I have from the misfortune of my daughter Mariquita,” though she does not elaborate on this misfortune.²⁶⁹ In a concluding remark, the author ends the letter with a short “your mother... who loves you.”²⁷⁰ This letter hits home the true distance between the lives led by emigrants in the Americas and the

²⁶⁸ “hijas de mi alma,” “en haber acertado con tan buen marido,” Wife of Domingo de Oria to Inés Hernández and María Hernández (April 15, 1603), Carta 138 in *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540-1616*, Enrique Otte and Guadalupe Albi, compilers (Sevilla: Consejería de Cultura, 1988): 136.

²⁶⁹ “sabe Dios la pena que tengo de la desgracia de mi hija Mariquita,” de Oria, Carta 138: 136.

²⁷⁰ “su madre...que las quiere,” de Oria, Carta 138: 136.

families left behind in Spain. The stepdaughters to whom de Oria's wife wrote would most likely never even meet her. In truth, all they probably ever knew about her is contained in this letter, which itself has very little personal or identifying information.

Interestingly, the next letter in the compilation is from Domingo de Oria himself and he makes no mention of his new wife, nor does he invite his daughters to travel to live with the couple. This makes it all the stranger that this missive was even in the archive in the first place. Without knowing all the specifics of this case, we can only speculate about why it was there. It is entirely possible that the stepdaughters in question wanted to migrate to the Americas and used the letters to demonstrate that they had close family they could go live with. They also could have chosen to emphasize some of the vague platitudes such as the wife of de Oria's assertion that she hopes to God "that my eyes will see such good daughters in my company," as an invitation to migrate.²⁷¹ It is undoubtedly a tenuous link, but if either stepdaughter was desperate to improve her marriage prospects, she may have been motivated to attempt to use it.

Significantly, there are several hints within this particular text that de Oria's wife did not pen the letter herself. The first hint, logically, is that her own name does not appear in the letter, though the name of her husband shows up no less than three separate times in this short missive. The second hint is that the letter is labeled "without signature," implying that she either could not be bothered to sign it or was unable to do so.²⁷² While it is entirely possible that some of the other women who wrote letters did so through an intermediary, there are no clear signs that this is the case. De Oria's wife thus

²⁷¹ "vean mis ojos tan buenas hijas en mi compañía," de Oria, Carta 138: 136.

²⁷² "sin firma," de Oria, Carta 138: 136.

stands out because of her positionality as an illiterate, or poorly educated, woman. Here her education level limited how she was able to frame her own narrative, confining her in ways that other, more educated or economically privileged women were not.

Conclusions

The simple conclusion is just this: that the lives of women who were caught up in the migration and conquest of sixteenth century Spain were determined by more than just their gender. Spanish women like Catalina Alvarez and Doña Leonor were wealthy enough to be able to help their family members to cross the ocean. In some ways, they shared more in common with men like Hernando Gutiérrez, Juan de Camargo, and Francisco Ramírez Bravo in their quest for an heir or familial support than they did with the struggling María Alonso and the undereducated wife of Domingo de Oria. At the same time, gender did make a difference in the message and register of these letters. In these eight letters, women were more likely than men to get involved in discussion of legitimacy based around birth in marriage while men were more likely to mention the transitive property of their own honor onto their families. Women more often mentioned God, while men focused on exact monetary amounts. Yet these gender divides were never a strict barrier, but rather a more fluid membrane separating one social group from the other. In some cases, male heads of households had to implore their wives and daughters to join them, as with Diego de Navarrete and Francisco Ramírez Bravo, while at other times women performed the stereotypic role of being submissive to their husbands' needs.

To read these letters is to better understand the complexities of individuals and the ways in which people simultaneously fulfilled ideals of class and gender while

transgressing these same stereotypes. It does not give us a broad sweeping picture of all emigrants ever, but instead helps complicate the simplistic narratives of gender and migration that are told in Spanish American history. The unique location of these letters, both geographically as transatlantic missives in a newly formed empire, and temporally in a moment of extraordinary cultural change and domination, allows for a rare insight into the fluidity of social categories.

One of the most important identities, shared among all letter writers, was their Spanishness. Being Spanish conferred a great deal of privilege that none of the letter writers ever directly alluded to. Yet it would be a mistake to simplify these complex individuals into a kind of dominating social force, intentionally wreaking havoc on indigenous peoples' lives and lands. These Spaniards too lived within hegemonic discourses that formed their worldviews and made invisible the deeply problematic aspects of empire. It does not change the fact that these Spaniards, along with thousands of others, benefitted socially and materially from the subjugation of peoples and individuals like Malintzin and Quispe Sisa. It does, however, humanize these people who, just like every other actor in these chapters, does the best for themselves given their particular limitations and opportunities. They are all just human.

Final Conclusions

Let us return to Magnus Mörner's claim that "the Spanish Conquest of the Americas was a conquest of women."²⁷³ The intersectional analysis woven throughout this thesis shows the partial truth of his assertion. While it is clear that women suffered greatly throughout the conquest, it is also obvious that women who were differently socially located lived extremely disparate lives. Obstacles that were insurmountable for one woman could easily be pushed aside by another. What is considered a 'universal' norm, such as legitimacy, actually acts in diverse manners depending on who is affected and how. Beyond a comprehensive analysis of identity, Mörner's claim also lacks the conception of women as active participants, shaping and forming their own lives, and not just existing as the passive conquerable object that men thoughtlessly plundered. Agency, when combined with intersectional identities, allows for a deeper understanding of the messy lives of these women and allows a certain amount of their humanity to be illuminated and reclaimed.

The Spanish conquest of the Americas is one such period in which contradictions and messiness is unavoidable. For all the violence, pain, and injustice served throughout the decades of conquest and colonization, there were often benefits and advantages to all the chaos, even for some of the most marginalized individuals. For indigenous women like Malintzin, the conquest provided a rare opportunity to improve social status and leave behind the bonds of slavery. This rise in status did not come without consequences,

²⁷³ Magnus Mörner, "The Conquest of Women," in *People and Issues in Latin American History: The Colonial Experience: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Lewis Hanke and Jane M. Rausch (New York: M. Wiener Publishing, 1993), 116.

but neither was the experience entirely negative for her. She was an active agent, deeply involved in changing the course of her own life, rather than being passively ‘conquered’ by Spanish men. For other indigenous women, like Quispe Sisa and Cuxirimay, the results of the conquest were also mixed. These women experienced a certain loss of social status, but not so much that they did not live economically comfortable lives. They lost a significant amount of independence and political power with their new husbands, but were able to navigate the Spanish legal system to their benefit. They, like Malintzin, actively improved their situations to the best of their abilities, given the constraints, and the opportunities, available to them.

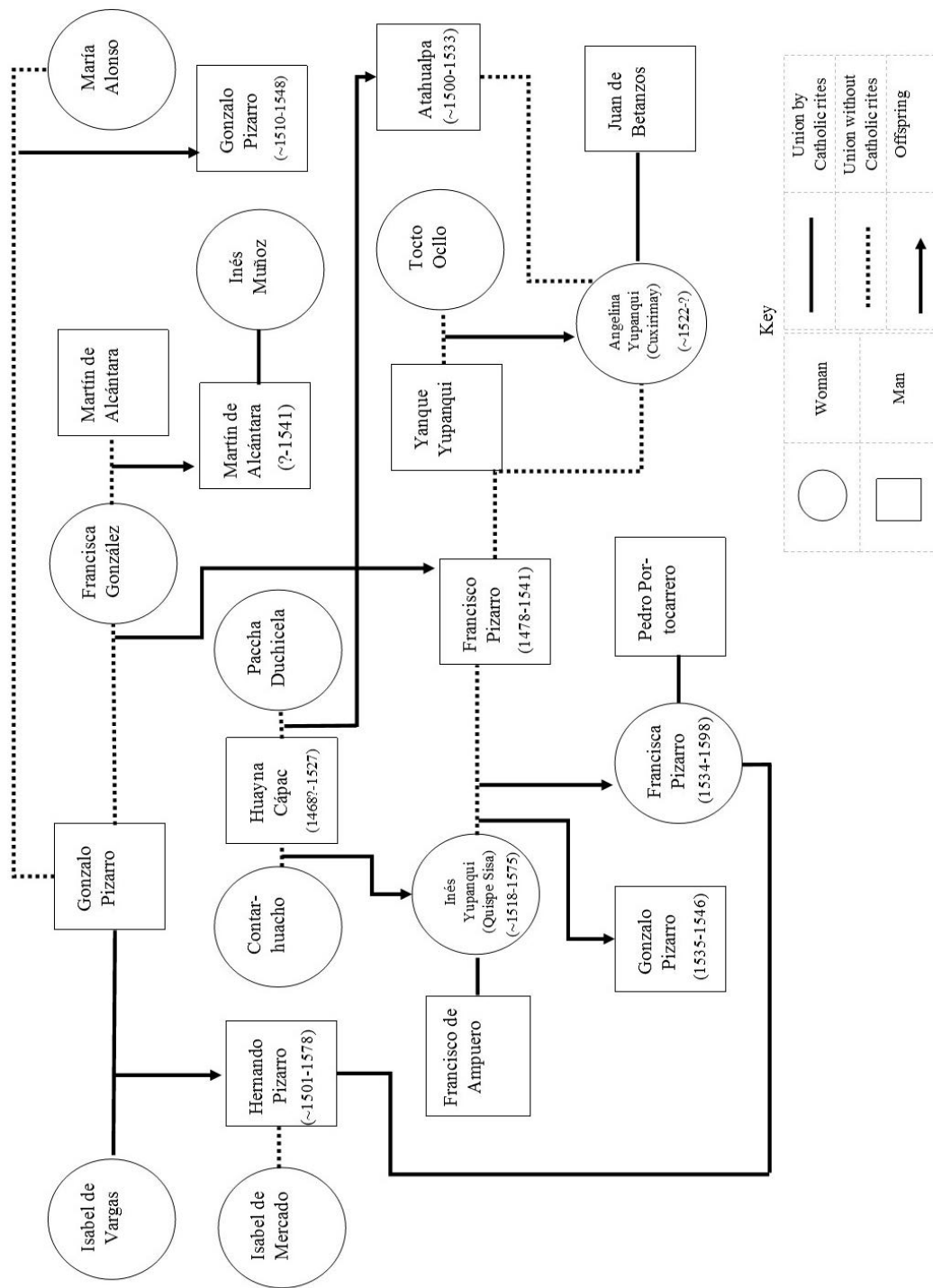
The same could be said for Doña Francisca Pizarro. The conquest ultimately made her wealthy and influential, though she was always limited by the bounds of her gender and her responsibilities to her family. In fact, Francisca was one very privileged woman for whom the legacy conquest was largely beneficial. Likewise, immigration provided mixed results for Spanish women. Catalina Alvarez was able to marry well and increase her economic and political power, just as Doña Leonor de Aguilera was also able to use her class status to settle comfortably in the New World. The relatives of Diego de Navarrete, Francisco Ramírez Bravo, and Hernando Gutiérrez all received the economic and social benefits of their familial connections. Juan de Camargo’s wife, through their marriage, was able to offer her husband and his family an increased social status and economic power. However, on the other end of the spectrum, María Alonso found herself destitute and alone, with few resources at her disposal, whilst the wife of Domingo de Oria was perhaps comfortable but relied on her husband to tell her story.

It would be foolish to claim that these women did not have much in common. They all had to navigate a legal system that considered them less reliable or valuable than their male counterparts. They all interacted with varying discourses of legitimacy, honor, respectability, and marriage. Above all, each one of them did her very best to make her life livable, if not extraordinary. Yet despite all these similarities, it would be a mistake to assume that together these women made one cohesive group. Women in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire did not all have the same opportunities, the same challenges, or the same lived experiences. Their lives were mitigated by power relations along gendered, classed, racialized, and linguistic lines. Depending on their multiple and simultaneous identities, they were able to navigate these power relations with varying degrees of success.

Ultimately, the stories of their lives gives us two main lessons. First, that historians must always consider the intersectional identities of their historical subjects. Women are never simply women; but instead live all of their multiple identities simultaneously. Humans are paradoxical and chaotic beings, but to smooth out their rough edges or simplify their lives leaves a profound part of history entirely untold. Secondly, it is indisputable that individuals always have agency. How they are able to exercise that agency is entirely dependent on the material conditions of their lives, the social constrictions of dominant powers, and their own personal desires, but regardless, agency is always present. Acknowledging and accounting for agency allows us to not only better understand historical actors, but also helps us resist mythologizing narratives that dehumanize and essentialize individuals by forcing them into false dichotomies and

categories. Women have often been misused and mistreated throughout time, but they deserve better in our histories. As historians, we have an ethical duty to our subjects to recognize them as full and multifaceted human beings; no matter how difficult or strenuous that process might be.

Appendix A: Family Tree of Francisca Pizarro



Appendix B: Chart of Letters

Letter Number	Author	Gender	Recipient	Year	Location	Other identities
643	Diego de Navarrete	Man	Wife	1583	Santo Domingo, New Spain	Merchant, married
378	Catalina Alvarez	Woman	Brother	1565	Mariquita, Peru	Wealthy by marriage, encomienda
359	Juan de Camargo	Man	Son	1573	Tamalameque, Peru	Wealthy by marriage
112	Doña Leonor de Aguilera	Woman	Nephew	1591	Mexico, New Spain	High social status, matriarch
283	Hernando Gutiérrez	Man	Son	1583	Panama, Peru	Wealthy merchant
216	Francisco Ramírez Bravo	Man	Daughter	1582	Nochtepec, New Spain	Wealthy, hacienda owner
553	María Alonso	Woman	Sister	1585	Cuzco, Peru	Poor, unmarried
138	Wife of Domingo de Oria	Woman	Step-daughters	1603	Mexico, New Spain	Uneducated, married

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