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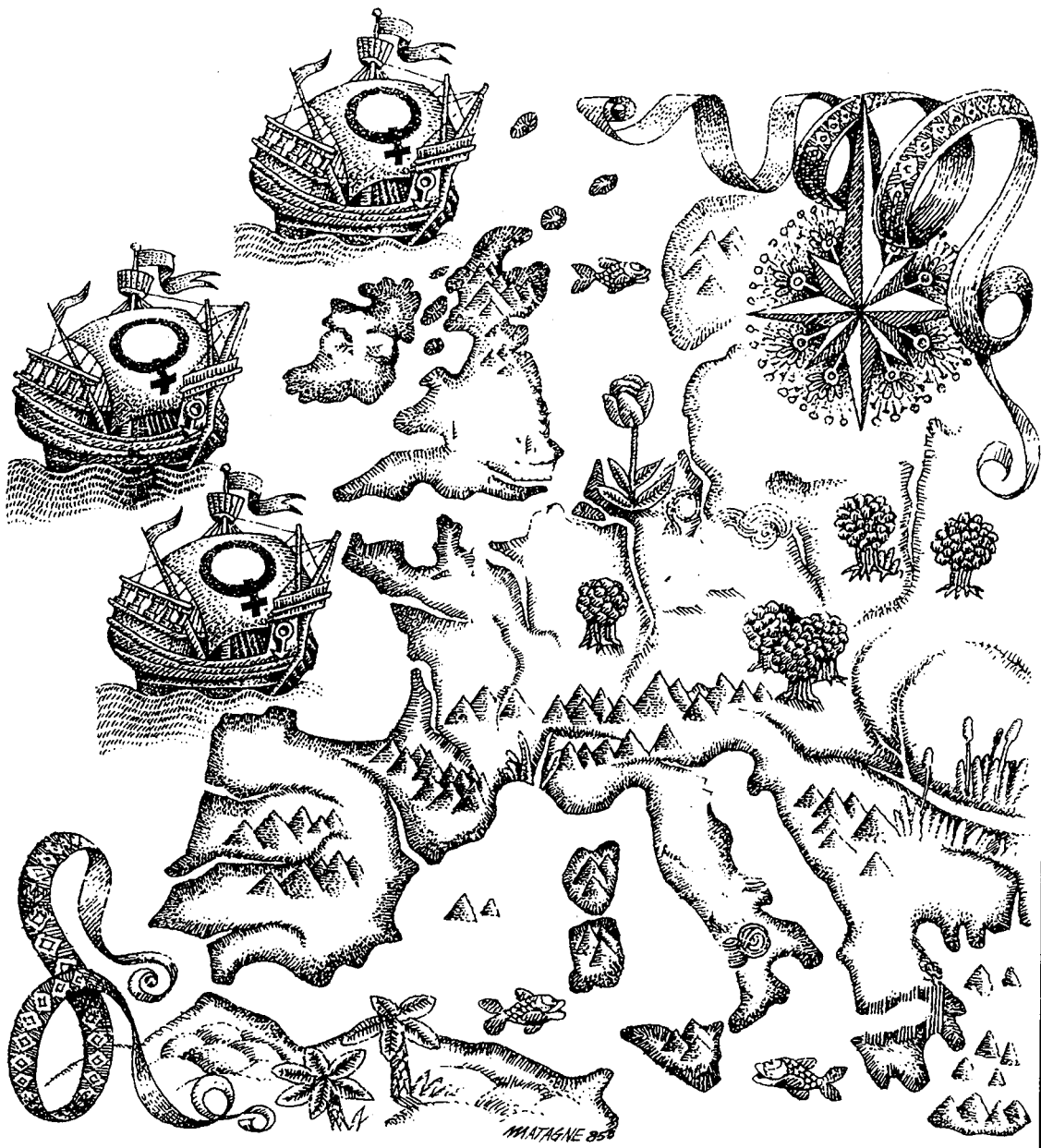
1492: THE ROLE OF WOMEN



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EUROPE
Supplements

1492 : The Role of Women

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1492: The role of women

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1492: The presence of women

1. Women: a story enshrouded in silence

I had all but chosen silence, but as silence is a negative thing (...) one must add a brief commentary to silence...

Juana Inés de la Cruz

From this date onwards, the world became enclosed. Paradoxically, this undertaking hailed the start of the modern era: indeed, it was in fact to prove more decisive for the history of humanity than the discovery of outer space. The contact with peoples which up until that time had been totally unknown and Christopher Columbus' voyage towards the "Indies" itself have since been the object of many speculations, some of which are highly extravagant. Nonetheless, to this day a number of mysteries have persisted regarding this unrepeatable historical event which, on the European side of the ocean, ushered in a period of prosperity while, on the American side, it heralded the end of the modus vivendi among the indigenous people. Why, for example, did Anacaona, the queen of the Taino, welcome Columbus and those white men from the other world, from the sea, with the honours which were reserved for superhuman beings, having mistaken these men for the sons of the Moon? Why were all the indigenous populations of America who awaited the return of their divinity to the Earth not in the least surprised to see Europeans disembarking upon their shores?

The celebrations for the fifth centenary have offered many new possibilities for a reexamination and a critical analysis of the historical facts. Indeed, the various points of view adopted are based on contrasting ideological matrices. Nonetheless, these conceptions of the past have one point in common: the absence or marginal presence of the feminine factor, an element which has long been shrouded in the silence of history. However, the entire American adventure is marked by the electrifying presence of extraordinary and intrepid women. In order to complete the task of piecing together the remaining clues attesting to the role played by women in history, we must set these women free from the silence and from the distortions which have been projected on them by outside forces. 1492 is a symbolic date, but to fully appreciate the magnitude of the "American adventure" and the great role played by its female protagonists, we shall need to reexamine more than two centuries of history.

Whether they be queens, like Anacaona - whom Columbus met on the island of Hispaniola beyond the ocean - or Isabel who had made the undertaking possible, or simply women, these figures who marked the XVI and XVII centuries threw open the door to a fantastic and wonderful universe, which is nonetheless real, a world of poetesses, saints and even nuns living under the guise of men. We thus become witnesses to a secret universe which is often rendered opaque by the gloss of legends or by a criminal lack of information.

It must be said that women in fact appear very little in the chronicles or documents of the time. Those who are mentioned are generally wives, mothers or women who are connected in some way with the protagonists of the history of Europe or America. Few people know the princess Isabel Chimpu Occlo, the grand-daughter of the last great Inca emperor Atahualpa Tupac Yupanchi. She was the mother of one of the first and greatest mestizo writers of the time, Inca Garcilazo de la Vega, who was born of her union with a *conquistador* who subsequently repudiated her to marry a Spanish woman. She told her son of the legends of her people and revived through him the splendour of the court of Cuzco and of Inca society. By contrast, some people may know Malinche, who first acted as an interpreter between the Aztecs and the Spanish and was subsequently the lover of Hernan Cortéz and was unjustly accused of betraying her people for the *conquistador* of Mexico. It is too often forgotten that Malinche, or Doña Marina, belonged to the Maya people, who were brutally subjugated by the Aztecs.

This has happened because history has for a long time been written and conceived exclusively in relation to the dominant figures. There is very little evidence remaining of the involvement of women in history - apart from a few rare queens or princesses, like Catalina of Portugal, to whom Inca Garcilazo de la Vega dedicated the *Comentarios reales de los Incas*[1] - as if the social and historical processes were not the result of a collective endeavour. The less restrictive conception of history adopted nowadays provides a means of carrying out a thorough reexamination which even affects the very way in which we consider the events which, five centuries ago, irreversibly pushed back the frontiers of the globe.

By creating a parallel between the history of famous women and that of unknown women - who appear sporadically through archaeological finds and through the legal vicissitudes of wives who either embarked on the American adventure or who remained in Europe to wait for their husband - we can determine the territory in which women lived out their destiny. The choice was between marriage vows or nun's vows: we should therefore not be surprised to discover that a considerable number of young ladies, especially the less well-off, pronounced nun's vows out of a desire for freedom and a wish to transgress the dictates of a restrictive social order.

Teresa d'Avila, who came from a simple background among the class of artisans, is a fairly typical representative of this inevitable contradiction. Her story is a microcosm which reflects the whole spectrum of conflicts of the time and the margins of female existence from which Teresa was to an extent able to free herself, including her use of the written word. Paradoxically, the only female Doctor of the Church had a grandfather who was actually a Jew in Spain at the time of the "purity of blood" laws, while her father was a fresh convert to Catholicism, her brothers had gone to the Indies in search of fortune and some of her friends were burnt by the Inquisition.

Delving into history from a female perspective therefore involves divesting oneself of certain prejudices. For example, for a long time it was thought that European women had only voyaged to the Indies at a later stage. Today, however, archaeology has uncovered the presence of white women in La Isabela (Dominican Republic), which was the first European settlement founded by Columbus in 1494 in honour of the queen of Castile.

The rediscovery of these female skeletons in the cemetery of La Isabela has thrown light on the presence of women which was scarcely mentioned by the chroniclers of the Indies, with the sole exception of Hernando Colón[2] - the natural son of Beatríz Enríquez de Arana and of the Admiral - who states that women arrived as stowaways, accompanying their husband as early as the second voyage (1493-1496). It has now been established that there were a few women on board the three caravels on the first journey and others would similarly join the third voyage[3]. However, according to the chroniclers of the time, when the governor Francisco de Bobadilla arrived on the island in 1501, the Spanish population was officially composed exclusively of a group of over 300 men. The following year, Nicolás de Ovando, who was designated as governor in place of Bobadilla - the latter was accused of having unjustly chained Columbus and his family - left Spain accompanied by 2,500 people, including around seventy women, most of whom were married and who were travelling with their husbands. This number may at first sight appear insignificant: the truth is that, because of the cost of the licence, women were registered as accompanying their husbands in the list of passengers to the Indies.

It was therefore not until Diego Colón - son of the noble Portuguese lady Filipa Moníz Perestrello and of Columbus - arrived in Santo Domingo accompanied by María de Toledo as the governor of the island that we find a large number of single ladies, some of whom subsequently married in the Indies. The name of the oldest and most beautiful street in Santo Domingo testifies to their presence: *La calle de las Damas*... Indeed, the so-called "Ladies' Avenue" is still a place for casual strolling. The street starts outside the palace of Diego Colón and passes in front of the former residence of Nicolás de Ovando, then crosses the Conde avenue and continues towards the cathedral.

The following piece of fragmentary evidence of the presence of women has survived the passing centuries. In addition to Eldorado and the Terrestrial Paradise, we find in the chronicles another mythical place: the Indies also contained fantastic regions and countries which were inhabited only by women and where there was gold in abundance. Father Bartolomé de Las Casas, the famous and faithful chronicler of Columbus, spoke of such places. Referring to the Ciguayos, a tribe encountered by the Admiral on the island (which is now part of the territory of Haiti), he writes:

> they all had very long hair, like our own ladies in Castile; he spoke to him (Columbus) of an island which was called Martinio (Martinique) where there was much gold to be found and which was inhabited only by women...[4]

Columbus himself associated the idea of Eldorado with the presence of women:

> they say that there is an infinite quantity of gold in that place and (...) that the women wear necklaces which hang from their head down their backs.[5]

The popular image of Columbus has given birth to other feminine myths associated with the Genovese in the perception and descriptions given by sea-farers: there was talk of sirens, but in reality they were seals swimming on the rising waves of the ocean and "they were not as beautiful as they say..." (January 9 1493).

1.1. The genesis of the voyage

Filipa Moníz Perestrello and women in Portugal in the second half of the XV century

From the start of adolescence until the age of marriage, the life of young well-to-do Portuguese girls was protected behind walls and safeguarded by the rigid discipline of the convent. In Lisbon, the Recolhimento de Encarnaçao was a convent for young aristocratic girls and particulary those of the military order of San Giacomo. It was originally intended as a place of retreat for the wives and daughters of knights who had left their country to fight against the "infidels".

It was here that Columbus met Filipa Moníz Perestrello in 1478. The public was in fact admitted into the chapel. In addition, men often went there to attend the services but actually in search of a well-bred wife. Columbus was 27 years old when he arrived in Lisbon, and his great ambition was to make contact with the patricians of the city. Filipa came from a highly respected family. Furthermore, the nautical collection of Filipa's father, on the island of Porto Santo, an archipelago of Madeira - discovered by her father himself - was considered as the greatest oceanographic library of the time, second only to the library of the Sagres observatory, the sanctuary for sailors created by prince Enrico. In Sagres, the Genovese was considered as a foreigner and was not given access to the nautical documentation available to Portuguese sailers and which Columbus and his brother Bartolomeo needed for the cartographic work in which they were engaged in Lisbon in 1477.

When Filipa, according to the chroniclers, became conscious of the constant presence of Columbus in the convent chapel and of his charm, she began to go to mass every day to get a chance to see him. At night, she waited for him in convent cloisters. These clandestine meetings did not go unnoticed and Filipa's mother, Doña Isabel Moníz - who belonged to one of the oldest families in the Algarve which had ties with the royal families of Portugal and Spain - was immediately informed. Although the Moníz Perestrello had in fact their connections at court and could boast of having friends in high places, they had suffered several serious financial disasters and the mother, who was now a widow, felt apprehensive at the thought of having to provide a dowry for her daughter. She therefore happily accepted the request to offer Filipa as a husband for Columbus. The great oceanic library of the illustrious Portuguese family would have constituted a substantial dowry for this girl whose father was a poor, unknown, foreign and probably Jewish weaver, and who could expect no better than this.

Apart from her Italian ancestry on her father's side, Filipa had nothing in common with Columbus - whose father plied a trade which was considered the apanage of marginalized sectors of society. Filipa's family could in fact trace their origins on her father's side back to one of the first consuls appointed by Rome to the new colony of Piacenza on the banks of Po. During the Middle Ages, the Pallastrelli family were the well-known powerful feudal lords of Piacenza and the owners of rich property on the banks of the largest of the Italian rivers. It was in 1385 that Filippo Pallastrelli and Caterina Visconti emigrated to Portugal. They were subsequently to be known as the Visconti of Balmesao and their name underwent a slight change.

The oceanographic library of Filipa's father therefore allowed Columbus to gain access to all that nautical knowledge from which he had been excluded by his humble origins. Furthermore, thanks to the new status he had acquired through his marriage, Columbus participated more and more often in Portuguese expeditions to Africa. In fact, his contacts with the court and with the sea became closer with every passing day until it reached the point where he neglected his wife Filipa who was now at death's door with tuberculosis. Filipa, to whom we may attribute the genesis of the great voyage, because she challenged him to become a discoverer of uncharted lands like his father before him and because she gave him the patrimony of her family and a son, Diego. However, Filipa is never mentioned in the writings of Columbus and rarely features in the countless biographies of the Admiral. She is not even depicted at his side in the statues which, in Portugal and even in Madeira, commemorate the start of this memorable adventure.

1.2. The departure and the condition of women in Europe at the end of the XV and in the XVI and XVII centuries

The adventure has long been presented as a story of men written, as is often the case, without taking too much account of the role of women or their contribution to and participation in these events. From the third voyage onwards, the Spanish crown ordered Columbus to take with him thirty Spanish ladies together with the three hundred men while, as we shall see, the law established that married men leaving for the Indies had three years for their wives to rejoin them. They were also accompanied on this voyage by white Christian female slaves. These were the *moriscas*, women of Moslem origin who had been converted during the reconquering and taken into slavery and who were to be taken on board to serve the *conquistadors*. At the time of the most intensive emigration - between 1509 and 1538 - it may be said that around 10% of the departure authorizations registered by the General Archives of the Indies were granted to women, some of whom were single.

Isabel

The American adventure was born under the aegis of a woman, Queen Isabel the Catholic. According to Castilian law, the daughter of a king could inherit the throne if there were no male offspring. When Isabel became Queen of fifteenth century Spain, it was a territory divided into small Christian kingdoms which were often at war. Castile was only one of these kingdoms. Furthermore, the south of the country was occupied by the Moors who had invaded Spain a century before. El-Andaluz (which was to become Andalusia), was arguably the richest and most tolerant region in Islam: it represented a bridge, a privileged channel for the spread of knowledge of the arts and sciences to Europe.

Isabel married King Fernando of Aragona and was thus able for the first time to rule over the whole Iberian peninsula which became Catholic. She then drove out the Moors and the Jews. The Catholic kings embarked on a war to reconquer the Holy Land. Although Isabel's funds were very low when the war came to an end, she consented to Columbus' extravagant request, which the King and his courtiers regarded as bizarre and impossible. It in fact took six years to secure royal approval and to find the two million (*cuentos*) of *maravedí* which were needed for the explorer's first voyage.

According to the legend, the "Serenissima" Queen sold her pleasures to get this money, but we in fact know that she obtained it thanks to a loan granted by several powerful bankers in Genoa and Tuscany who lived in Spain and, more especially, from Francesco Pinelli and Luis de Santángel, who were businessmen with connections in Genoa. If Isabel had had her way, Columbus would probably have been granted the authorization he had been promised and would not have been taken in chains in the autumn of 1500 from Santo Domingo to Seville. However, King Ferdinand himself probably instigated that series of intrigues at the expense of the Admiral which led to him being refused all the privileges which had been promised when the enterprise was considered impossible, including the post of viceroy, which was an honour quite unthinkable to bestow upon a foreigner of low extraction. The King probably also did this to get the upper hand in the administration of the Indies which initially was to be under the rule of Isabel.

Even before the outset of the adventure which was to make her famous throughout the world as the sovereign of the New World, Isabel had demonstrated great skill in the administration of her government, creating laws to benefit the people, seeking to eliminate corruption and improving legislation. Indeed, it is not surprising to learn that any "conquistador" who set off for the New World needed the authorization of his wife and could not stay in the Indies for more than three years. As a result, we have records of husbands pleading with their wives to be given authorization under threat of imprisonment.

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1 Inca Garcilazo de la Vega, Comentarios reales de los Incas, Lisbon; 1609.

2 *Historia del Almirante* (1539), Madrid, 1984.

3 Juan Gil, "El Rol de tercer viaje Colombino." in *Historiografia y bibliografia americanistas*, vol. XXIX; Seville.

4 "traian todos los cabellos muy luenjos, como en Castilla nuestras mujeres; dijole (a Colón) de una isla que se llamaba Matinino (Martinica) que tenía mucho oro y que estaba habitada de solos mujeres...". Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, (1527-1565), t. I, p. 304, Mexico City, 1954.

5 Cristoforo Colombo, *Lettere ai Reali di Spagna*, p. 78, Palermo; 1991.

The conquest of letters: the challenge of women to the ban on learning in Europe in the XVI and XVII centuries

The problem posed by the ban on writing which was imposed on women is rendered all the more complex by the obstacles which were put in the way of any woman in Spain, Portugal or Italy in the XVI century who wished to gain access to learning and thus become involved in history:

> the thing which most pains me is that I am a woman and that there appears to be a law which has become part of tradition whereby women are denied access to writing[1].

The woman who denounced this situation was Maria de San José, the first prioress of Seville in 1575. This distant descendant of the dukes of Medinaceli thus expressed the meaning of the act of writing, which she herself defined as her "great challenge".

In the XVI century in Europe, the education of women had become one of the main issues of the time even before the debate called the *Querelle de femme* arose and subsequently became a historical reality. Through the widespread elimination of illiteracy, many women were transformed from readers into writers. Louise Labbé invited women to write (1555), Vittoria Colonna had already published her *Rime* in Parma (1538). These great poetesses of love of the fifteenth century are the evidence of a European feminine culture among the privileged urban classes. However, this involvement in the world of letters does not demonstrate that there was any economic aim behind the education of such women.

The objective of the education of women in the XVI century was chiefly to prepare the women for marriage and for the duties related to the institution of marriage. The religious model of the mother as the person who is responsible even for fulfilling the educational requirements of the children is also a feature of the images of Saint Anna which we find in Germany and in Holland. Indeed, we find her image even in France, Italy, Seville and San Juan de Portorico. The model of Saint Anna and the widespread worship of this saint evoke a family reading in an intimate scene with the mother as protagonist. However, we also know that education for women was something private and restricted.

In the Spain of the Counter-reformation, despite the rigid provisions for the imposition of enclosure issued by the Council of Trent, the convent appear to have preserved its central function as a kind of educational establishment. In addition, education was given privately at home. The countries of the Reformation were subsequently to promote an educational system in public schools which differentiated between sexes.

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1 "lo que más me acobarda, es ser mujer, a quien ya por ley que ha hecho lo costumbre, parece que le es vedado el escribir".

The educational objective was to accentuate the virtue of women rather than to integrate them into the social and professional categories reserved for men. The uppermost levels of education remained forbidden territory for women, as was also the case with the teaching profession and the exercise of most of the professions. The division of labour originated within the family unit; within the family, the woman is the mother and this is her function according to the natural philosophy of the time. Woman must be subordinated to man in Aristotelian terms.

The exclusion of women from institutions and the discrediting of the opinion of women provoked women to defend their cultural identity which finally led them to decide to take up writing as a means of claiming their entitlement to education. Being excluded from the institutions and languages of power and therefore from universities and from Latin, women began to write in their national vernacular. Several such women, despite their knowledge of the classical languages, did not possess the qualifications which would have allowed them to obtain a chair. At the forefront of the cultural claims of women in the XVII century, we find two names, the Venetian Lucrezia Marinelli (*La nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti e mancamenti degli uomini*, 1601) and the Dutch Anna Maria Von Schurman (1641). A Spanish woman, Maria de Zayas, was to say in the prologue to her *Novelle amorose e esemplari* (1637): "let them give us books and preceptors" and "we shall therefore be eligible for positions and chairs, just like men, and perhaps even more intelligent".

Seventeenth century Seville had a highly diversified social structure. At the beginning of the century, women exercised considerable influence in the city. The men had been decimated by the military levies or they had sailed to the Indies, leaving their wives to administer the family property and a large number of widows thus ended up having to manage the family business.

Husbands were rare among the middle classes. Nobel ladies who had small dowries to offer were obliged to take nun's vows rather than marriage vows. The women who were most marginalized entered into service or worked freely. The number of *expósitos* (children who were abandoned and living on public generosity) is evidence of the existence of a large number of mothers who were unable to cope with the administration of the family business and who were often abandoned by husbands who had left for the Indies. The number of women who could read is unknown. However, even if we do know that women in the merchant classes did read, not all women could also write. The ladies of Seville who belonged to the privileged classes and who had probably received a convent education could frequent certain literary circles within academies or in private houses and thus maintained the courtly tradition of the lady of learning.

Maria de Zayas y Sotomayor

> If tobacco may be looked upon as the most uncivilized of habits, it can rightly be compared to disrespect (...) for women, which is the most abominable vice that can be.

Dear reader, I am in no doubt that you will wonder at the fact that a woman has had the audacity not only to write a book but to go as far as to print it. Indeed, this is where the purity of motives can be seen because, as long as writings have not been printed with letters of lead, they have no any real value. The senses may in fact be deceived by these writings in the same way as our fallible visual perception may take to be solid gold what turns out in the heat of the fire to be but a piece of embellished bronze.

I am, therefore, in no doubt that many will look upon my incredible audacity at publishing my scribbles as an act of folly. After all, I am but a woman and, in the opinion of many fools, a woman is quite incapable of anything. However, anyone else, that is, anyone who is at least a courtly spirit worthy of the name, will not disdain my daring endeavour as something eccentric and will not denounce it as madness. Indeed, if this matter of which we men and women are formed is a mixture of earth and fire or a combination of angel and demon, and if there is no more nobility in this composition in men than in us women; indeed, if our blood is the same, if the faculties which we and they possess and our organs are potentially equal, if our soul is identical, because souls have no sex, how can they believe that they are intelligent and that we are incapable of intelligence? In my view, they have no other response to give than their cruelty or their tyranny, because they keep us locked up and refuse to give us tutors. It can thus be seen that the real reason why women are not learned is not through any lack of aptitude but rather through a lack of application. If in the course of our education, we wasted less time on canvases, needlework and embroidery frames and they gave us books and tutors instead, we would be suitable for any trade and even for university chairs like men. Perhaps we would even prove to be more perspicacious than men, as we are more level-headed by nature and have a more ductile intellect, which is evident from the way in which women can give quick retorts and think up clever artifices. After all, anything which is done with skill can be called intelligence, even if it is not virtuous.

If these arguments are not sufficient proof of our worth, let history decide, because we can see what has been achieved by women who, through some chance event, have devoted themselves to letters. I say this not in defence of my ignorance, but rather to provide examples in support of my impertinence (...).

I feel I need not beseech your understanding in this respect because if the book is good, you will need no prompting to give it praise and, if it is bad, you will treat it with respect out of the courtesy due to any woman. One cannot win with women: anyone who disrespects women is a fool because he needs them, while anyone who insults women is ungrateful because he shows a lack of respect for the hospitality which he was offered on the first day. So it is that, since I am sure that you will be neither discourteous, foolish or cruel, I offer this book, safe in the knowledge that if it does not please you, you will excuse me because I was born a woman and cannot therefore be expected to write good stories, but with the ardent desire to serve you well[1].

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1 Emilia Mancuso, Maria de Zayas: *una donna in difesa delle donne nella Spagna del '600*, Rome; 1980.

Ana Caro: the problem of woman writers in Seville during the "siglo de oro"

From the pragmatic viewpoint of literary communication, the writings of women encouraged private audiences, since female discourse could not be rendered "public". Furthermore, female discourse could not take on the trappings of "power", that is, it could not represent authority. This may have prompted Teresa d'Avila to say that "women are better understood when they are talking together". This is probably the reason why Ana Caro wrote the dedication to her *Relación de las Fiestas y Octava a doña Leonor de Luna Enríquez* with the presupposition that she would be understood more readily by female readers because she was a woman. This was probably a rhetorical strategy designed to mask the transgression which she was thus committing by making female discourse public through a publication or a play.

The fact that a woman was able to become a writer was not a novelty in the first half of the XVI century, but the fame which she achieved as a playwright was indeed something new. It is probably for this reason that Ana Caro presents herself as a deviation from the norm. As a member of the cultivated and lettered privileged classes, she had the breeding of a lady and was often referred to as such. On the other hand, it is surprising that a woman could write for the theatre in return for payment and that she in fact claimed this payment for her work. This could be looked upon as something bizarre and unconventional in the courtly ethos of the times.

The historical uniqueness of Ana Caro transcends purely biographical considerations. Her very existence is at variance with the regime of restrictions which the institutions of the time sought to impose on women and with the vision which history conventionally proposes, particularly in the antinomy between the silent or private word and the word as a public attribute of power. The works of Caro, which, surprisingly, were published, circulated and put on the stage, must be seen within the whole social context, even if only partly, as a form of literary political propaganda against the official culture.

1.3. The arrival in the New World in 1492

In order to ascertain the position of women within Amerindian society, we must take into account several sources of information:

- hieroglyphics, paintings, sculptures, ethno-archaeological finds and drawings on textiles provide direct evidence of the presence of women;

- current ethno-anthropological research, especially comparative research[1], provides a number of indirect links through the historical evidence provided by contemporary native women with features which have for centuries been attributes of their cultural heritage, as well as the transformation of these features and even, in some cases, the loss of these traits accompanied by a loss of identity;

- the descriptions in the diaries and chronicles of explorers and colonizers, written as they were by a European man at the end of the XV century or during the XVI or XVII centuries with the inevitable distortions resulting from his prejudices, provide little trace of those disparate populations living in the uncharted new lands and which included women. In fact, in the latter case, there is little mention of native women, who were considered generally, and by Columbus himself, as a part of the terrestrial paradise which had been discovered.

In his *Lettere ai Reali di Spagna*, the Admiral mentioned such women only rarely and gave more emphasis to the various myths which surrounded them. Columbus reached the island of Hispaniola - which is now divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic - and he considered the women of the island, who were exceptionally skilled in the use of the bow and arrow and who wore no feminine ornamentation, as Amazons (February 15 1493). He was also struck by the "gentleness" of the Taino, a native people organized into tribes, clans and families and who had elaborated their own political and economic structure. The head of the family was the father but the descendence was matrilinear.

Anacaona, Queen of Hispaniola

When Columbus arrived in Hispaniola, Anacaona was the most powerful sovereign on the island. Anacaona was a native woman of the Taino people and she governed the region of Jaragua. She was a cacique. In her society, the line of descendence was matrilinear and women could inherit power. By contrast, the women were excluded from fundamental rites and from any form of armed action. They were expected to take care of the fields and to tend the *yuca* plant to produce *cassava* with which to make a sort of bread. They were also responsible for ensuring the supply of water, doing handicrafts such as weaving, ceramics and basket-weaving in addition to preparing the food.

With regard to religious beliefs, although the Taino worshipped a goddess who had five different names - Athabeira, Guacarpita, Gumazva, Mamona and Yella - one of the rites associated with funerals was to bury the favourite wife of the king, or cacique, together with the other attributes of his wealth. Archaeologists have found evidence of this in various sites. Indeed, these female skeletons can be seen today preserved in certain museums on the island, such as the Dominican Museum of Mankind (Santo Domingo). In the Taino society, women were assigned to a subaltern role, although this was not always associated with marked discrimination, and their participation in religious, political or community life was never associated with any form of hegemony, apart from a few exceptions, notably Anacaona.

In the region of Jaragua, the realm of Anacaona, there was therefore a tradition which allowed women to assume power. When a cacique died, he was succeeded by his brother or sister and, in their absence, the sons or daughters of the sister. Anacaona came to power on the death of her brother. It was Anacaona who received Columbus and the Spanish delegation. At first, guided by the auspices, she looked upon them as divinities. Las Casas relates that the Queen of the Taino killed herself when she realized that her visitors had come from the sea and that they were mere human beings who by now dominated the country and had exterminated her people. All Anacaona's female descendants were to leave their mark on history: Higuemota, the daughter of the sovereign and especially Mencía, the grand-daughter of Anacaona and the wife of the Cacique Enriquillo, played a decisive role in the revolt which Enriquillo, together with the rest of the native population, fomented in the mountains of Bahoruco (south-west region of the Dominican Republic) to defend their own lands and liberty.

The figure of Anacaona lives on in the memory of the Dominican people, who have dedicated poems, books and songs to her. Her name is often chosen for streets, restaurants and public buildings. It is even the name of the voodoo pantheon.

A recently-restored statue depicts her naked on the base of the pedestal on which stands the sculpture of the Admiral and intent on writing his name. This can all be seen on the main square of Santo Domingo, just outside the first cathedral built in America.

Women in Amerindian society

The Aztec Civilization was one of the most important civilizations in America prior to the arrival of Europeans. Within two hundred years of their arrival in the valley of Mexico, this tribe of nomad worriers and hunters had developed into one of the most well-structured and complex societies in the continent. Thanks to this progress, the Aztec population, which had dominated many of the surrounding native tribes (the Tolteques, the Zapoteques, the Maya, etc.), succeeded in resisting the impact of conquest. Indeed, even if Mexico City rose from the ruins of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, even today there are many visible vestiges of its former splendour.

In Aztec civilization, the role of women was important in the fields of religion, agriculture, art and handicrafts, even though it is inferior to that of man. In the latter field of handicrafts, women were responsible for the whole production cycle of cotton and the manufacture of textiles. The whole process, from picking the fibres to dyeing the fabric, including weaving and embroidery, was carried out by female hands. In the religious field, we come across the figure of Chimalma, the priestess who guided the Aztec tribe during the period of nomadism prior to their arrival in the valley of Mexico. Here, they came in contact with the Tolteques, a sophisticated and artistic people whose culture the Aztecs assimilated.

Tolteque women played an important role in society, and some of them, like the queens of Tula, had been in power. This was reflected in their religion, in which the women-mother was a symbol of fertility and consequently associated with the Earth. The Tolteques were essentially farmers and therefore attached great importance to the earth-mother and, as a result, associated women with important natural elements such as the moon, the rain, etc. In the course of developing their culture, the Aztec society borrowed a considerable number of female divinities of which the most fervently worshipped were: the moon goddess Coatlique, the goddess of the green ears of corn Xilonen, the mistress of the Earth Tlalten and to goddess of milk Mayahuel. Women also played an important role in the worship of a pantheon as complex as that of the Aztecs. Even if their role was secondary, women were allowed to become priestesses, a position which some occupied until they married while others remained in the temple until their death.

Furthermore, an extraordinary fact when making a comparison with the structures of feminine education in Europe in the XV century, they were responsible for educating children. Like European women, the Aztec women spent their time weaving, cooking and embroidering fabrics and ceremonial garments.

With the increase in culture and sedentary activities, the Aztec people became involved in agriculture, while remaining a warlike society. In this respect, women had no opportunity to have a career equivalent to a man's. The only professional status which they were able to obtain on an equal footing with men was in the field of commerce, textiles or agriculture. It was chiefly a woman's job to husk and cook the maize cobs, which was the principal and sacred plant of all Amerindian civilizations. In addition to this staple crop, they had every type of plant found on the continent and for which the earth was cultivated by men.

The women had detailed knowledge of all the medicinal plants and herbs with which, as is still the case today, they prepared infusions and medicine. They also acted as "medical women" and tended to the sick. Furthermore, there is some evidence of the involvement of women in markets and in small and medium-sized commercial enterprises. Then as now, native women represented ninety percent of the vendors of herbs, medicinal plants, natural products, food, textiles and ceramics, while they remained largely excluded from political and military functions, from government and from social administration. In these areas of activity, their contact with the outside world was dependent on men.

The native women of the contemporary world have improved this situation through the education system and through the media. Nonetheless, certain similarities remain between the past and the present. In both types of society, the role of women extends to all spheres of activity, with the exception of politics and the armed forces. Their main function is to a great extent connected with the home, with two major exceptions: Aztec women had a seat on the board of merchants and, even today, native women play an important role in trade and in the education system, where they can be found at the top of the social ladder.

Another important difference may be seen from an economic point of view: the native women of today are in an even more subaltern position than in pre-Hispanic times. In fact, due to the influence of the Catholic Church, the opportunities for Aztec women in the world of work have been restricted and their activities are confined to the traditional domestic sphere. With the arrival on the scene of the "*conquistadors*", the entire social organization gradually disintegrated. As a result, many women were subsequently forced to serve, cook, clean, tend to and take care of the babies of the colonizers and had to relinquish all forms of independent activity.

The only Aztec women who were economically independent were the weavers, who could sometimes make sizeable profits. Even today, Amerindian women do not consider that it is indispensable to have some form of income, with the exception of widows or women who have been abandoned by their husbands. The few women who work for a salary are mainly teachers.

All the documents which could have demonstrated the possible conservatism of Aztec women have been lost. In today's world, the descendants of this ethnic group are showing an interest in innovation and in new technologies. Similarly, as regards the adaptability of indigenous populations, there are no documents which allow us to draw any conclusions in this respect. When one looks at present-day Amerindian women, one can see that they have adapted themselves more or less completely to the demands of society and to traditional cultural models, particularly the older generation, while the new generations are seeking to free themselves from these stereotypes.

Nowadays, the professional careers open to modern Amerindian women are chiefly those of school-mistress, nurse, pharmacist or doctor - roles which are part of their historical-cultural heritage. The place of the married woman in society is mainly that of the mother. Indeed, this role still has great importance and the most widespread means of achieving social advancement is in fact marriage. Although the attitude of society as a whole to women at work is not outright contempt, a hard-working and successful woman who is involved in a profession which is not part of the conventional sexist system, is generally described as being manly.

1.4. Settling down in the New World

For more than a quarter of a century, the island of Hispaniola, where the first capital of the New World was created, was the bridge towards the new territories of America. It was on this island that the flourishing of feminine artistic and literary talent took place before it gained a foothold anywhere else. Indeed, Leonor de Ovando and Elvira de Mendoza are mentioned among the first prose-writers and poetesses of the XVI century.

Without women, all those overseas (*ultramar*) institutions which men directed and organized, could not have been developed, and the language of Castile and Portugal would not have been spread to the extent which we know today. Indeed, a number of linguists have stressed the importance of women, particularly of Andalusian women, in the spread of Castilian to the American continent. It is to women that one may, for example, attribute the present-day predominance of a considerable number of typically Andalusian features of the Spanish language as spoken in many countries[2]. The whole question of oral communication, through which the role of women has now been lost, is difficult to retrace.

The house became the centre of culture in two ways. Firstly, Spanish women in their homes imparted Christian ideas to the Indians who worked as servants, while the native women taught Spanish women to cook and eat maize, potatoes, yucca, tomatoes and chocolate. Similarly, men learned to use tobacco. All these things which originated in the New World soon became established as unbreakable habits in the Old World.

A second centre of culture, the convent, represented for the women of the time the only possible avenue of access to education. It was a place where women could take advantage of solitude to study and write.

With the establishment of the colonies and the decimation of the indigenous population, there was soon a lack of manpower. For centuries, Africa provided an immense reserve of this manpower. Within the process of slavery (XV-XIX centuries), there were few controls and a great deal of clandestine trade in slaves, with the result that it is impossible to obtain precise information concerning the different races which emigrated and, more especially, on the exact number of men and women who were deported to America. According to approximate estimates, there were between ten and over sixteen million people, of which barely a third reached the end of the journey. In order to regulate this slavery, the *Código Negro* was issued in Spain in the first half of the XVI century.

The number of African women in slavery soon equalled and even exceeded the number of men. The presence of women subsequently became a key element in the first slave revolts when they were used to pacify spirits and, more especially, to bear families with a view to producing a labour force without the cost of transporting slaves. In addition, sexual intercourse was favoured to the point where, in 1527, it was established that black men and women could marry one another. As for native women, there was a certain tolerance, although this attitude was not entirely approved by the crown, and as early as 1514, mixed marriages were authorized with this aim in view. Nonetheless, such marriages remained limited to a few exceptions. Even today, marrying a woman with darker skin than oneself is seen as an affront to common sense. Indeed, in Santo Domingo, parents give their children the following advice: "no te cases con negra o negro, pues atrasas la raza" (don't marry a black person or you will

degenerate your race).

Juana Inés de la Cruz

The tale of the bold mestizo Juana Inés, which is both passionate and topical, has kindled the imagination of many people. Octavio Paz, the great Mexican writer and poet, a Nobel prize-winner for literature, was one of the best interpreters of her life. In the XVII century, during the reign of the viceroy of Mexico, a young girl called Juana Inés was possessed by a great desire to read. She began to read at the age of three. Later on, driven by this same desire and having discovered that women were not allowed to devote themselves to studies, she decided to enter a convent. There, she read countless books on science, history and poetry and meditated for long hours. Finally, this autodidact began to write poetry. She was very successful, and she is considered today as one of the greatest writers of the Baroque period.

Juana Inés was probably the first woman in America to write that all human beings have the same entitlement to education. However, the society around her was not able to understand her message. She was forbidden to write and threatened by her confessor, who said that if she persisted, she would be expelled from the convent. Throughout her life, this woman struggled against ignorance. She was a friend of the viceroy of Mexico, of poets and of thinkers. She wrote thousands of verses, theatre plays, poems, including works in honour of the viceroys. However, she eventually gave in to the pressure of her confessor and the mother superior of the convent and she stopped writing.

By order of Cortéz, the *conquistador*, Mexico was called New Spain throughout the XVI, XVII and XVIII centuries. Indeed, this name suited the country very well. It was in effect like another Spain and, at the same time, it was made up of a very special community.

It was in this community that a miracle took place. Juana Inés was a poor, illegitimate young girl; her grandfather, who was a farmer, had a well-stocked library; for this exceptionally gifted child, the fact that she was born on the margins of society was fortunate because a pious and intellectual vicereine welcomed her to her court where she was considered a phenomenon; subsequently, someone paid her fees for the Jeronimite Convent of Santa Paola.

The religious vows taken by the young Mexican girl would appear to have been a marriage of convenience. She led a triple life at the convent. Without being very mystic, Juana Inés was pious, charitable (particulary towards the servants) and a regular attender at choir practice. In the parlour, she was to become the "Tenth Muse of Mexico", a local object of veneration who enjoyed a rather exceptional status but to whom everyone believed they were entitled to address verses on "worldly" or religious subjects. Her "cell" was a real library. Sister Juana was naturally inclined to study, especially religious science. She had a good instinct for theology. "Don't look, eat", was the order she gave in a poem addressed to a saint to whom the Christ appeared in the host during mass. It is in this state of solitude that she also composed the *Sogno*, an extraordinary philosophical poem which was certainly not a commissioned work.

In actual fact, this balance was rather fragile. In order to nourish her intellectual life, Sister Juana was dependent on the outside world, which included society people and indiscrete tongues. Moreover, once the shutters of the parlour were closed, some of the nuns had ways of making the "Tenth Muse" pay dearly for the success which she owed to her talent and her charismatic personality: an "ingenuous" superior forbid her outright to study for several months. At the end of her life, there was a strange paradox. A noble vicereine - the Marquess of la Laguna - who had just returned to Spain, had published several volumes of her religious and profane verses. They were very successful and the church censors were the first to celebrate this new source of genius in the New World. Her fame obviously reached New Spain, but a short time later, a certain bishop sent her a letter full of admiration and signed "Suor Filotea", but this letter led the nun to renounce profane literature (1690). Sister Juana defended her actions in the superb "Answer to Sister Filotea", where she justifies her own personal case and argues methodically in favour of granting women access to studies.

In 1693 or 1694, therefore, she stopped writing, closed her parlour and sold the library to help the poor and led a genuine convent life. She died in 1695 during an epidemic after having cared for other nuns. This conversion has not been explained either by Juana herself or by her contemporaries, and it has led to protracted polemics. Many authors, especially Octavio Paz, have interpreted this conversion as the result of the pressure of ecclesiastical authority which was represented at the time by very austere personalities, including the archbishop and a well-known Jesuit[3].

The work is a protest against the behaviour of the Jesuit, who was accused of unleashing invectives against certain of Sister Juana's activities which he felt were incompatible with her status and a cause of "public scandal". The *Décima Musa* begins by saying that she has waited so long to receive the respect which she had for him, but that her patience had now run out. She goes on to put forward a triple defence of her behaviour. "You rebuke me for the profane verses which I write, and especially for my cooperation in the triumphal arch which greeted the viceroy in 1680, but I only gave in to this at the tenacious insistence of the archbishop, of the "cabildo pleno" of the cathedral and of the mother prioress. I only write my "negros versos" when I am constrained and forced, and I have already paid dearly for them through the jealousy which they have provoked: "extraño género de martirio" ("strange form of martyrdom"). She uses this second theme as a transition to the second reproach: her worldliness. If I have become the friend of the vicereine, it is because the mother prioress obliged me to be present the day when the viceroy and vicereine came to visit. What you are therefore defending zealously is learning. Women have an "alma racional" (rational soul) like men. Several great saints were women of learning.

The last third of the letter is more impressive. Sister Juana refuses her former confessor the right to supervise her conduct, stating four times that she does not depend on him.

A comparison must be made in this respect with the *Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz*, a harangue addressed on March 1 1691, almost ten years later, to another influential member of the clergy Don Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, the Bishop of Puebla who had written under a pseudonym.

The system of ideas regarding the condition of woman and the type of argumentation are identical. Octavio Paz was able to say that, while reading the new text, one had the impression that one was reading an extract from the *Respuesta*. What differentiates the two texts is, firstly, the objective and, secondly, the type of composition. Purporting to be a spontaneous outburst, the *Respuesta* is an extremely meticulously constructed piece of rhetoric. The aim is to show this prestigious person what a woman is capable of and to treat him with the respect due to a prelate. She recognizes all his merits but declares that these merits do not confer on him any power, and she proves that this function is not indispensable. She rebukes him for wishing to forbid others to do what he allows himself to do, that is, to enter the world of letters and to frequent the powerful of this world. Finally, she has the audacity to try to teach him how to carry out his mission and to say that he too is difficult to put up with ("infinitas ocasiones suyas me repugnan sumamente ... pero no por eso les condeno").

Catalina de Erauso

The incredible story of Catalina de Erauso, *written by herself*, is one of the most touching pieces of writing in the chronicles of America. At a time when it was intolerable for a woman to deviate from the binomial marriage/convent system, this Basque woman came close to achieving a degree of freedom similar to that of a man. To do this, however, she was obliged to live under a disguise for twenty years. Living in cruel times and in an ungenerous society, Catalina affirmed her own independence and was consumed by a contradiction.

The life of this woman who is known in the Indies and in all of Europe as the "standard-bearer nun" is quite extraordinary. Many have written of her adventures - including Thomas de Quincey - and the great painter from Seville Pacheco depicted her on her return from the Americas. She was a source of scandal and, at the same time, of great interest. She wrote her memoirs, probably in Seville in 1625, in order to obtain a "commendatory pension of 500 pesos to exploit land" which would allow her to return to the Indies, to Mexico, under the name of Antonio de Erauso, where she was to die in 1650. Strange to relate, Pope Urban VIII himself granted permission for her to continue to live in the guise of a man. The "Inquiry into the merits and services of Lady Catalina de Erauso" can still be read to this day in the Archives of the Indies, where there are a dozen documents attesting to the veracity of her story.

She had already been received by the King and her fame had even made her life difficult when she decided, before embarking on her second and last journey to the Americas, to publish the story of her life, the story of a woman who for more than twenty years had lived in the guise of a man and had shared the existence of people of the opposite sex, without ever being recognized, not even by her own father and mother or, less still, by her brother whom she met across the ocean and whom she unintentionally killed.

Catalina, like many girls of her age, had been forced to enter a convent. However, unlike these girls, Catalina ran away:

> I, doña Catalina de Erauso, was born in San Sebástian, Guipúzcoa, in the year 1585, daughter of Captain don Miguel de Erauso and doña María Pérez de Galarraga y Arce (...). In 1589, I was confined to the nearby convent of San Sebástian el Antiguo, which was run by Dominican nuns with my Aunt doña Ursula (...), the prioress of the monastery, in which I was educated until the age of fifteen, when I decided on the course of my future.
> During my year as a novice, towards the end, I had an fight with a nun who had taken her vows (...) she was well-built and I was gaunt: she beat me and I was mortally offended[4].

That very night, Catalina decided to run away. She opened the door of the convent and closed it behind her. She remained in hiding in the woods for three days: "using a skirt which I had on, I made a pair of braces and I made a tunic from the rough-hewn green cassock which I wore underneath". A disguise is the acquisition of the clothes of some other person. However, it is also the desire to seek physical identification with the world of the father-figure, the trustee of power and, consequently, the guardian of independence. She cut her hair which she threw away during the third night out of a desire only to run away, to reject her femininity, which she felt was a heavy encumbrance restricting and confining her. After many vicissitudes, she returned to San Sebástian and, from there, reached the Port of Pasajes, "hardly one league away", where she met a captain leaving with his ship for Seville:

> I asked him to take me on board and I offered him forty *reals*. I boarded the ship and we weighed anchor. Shortly afterwards, we reached San Lúcar (...) I signed on as cabin-boy on the galleon of Captain Esteban Eguiño ...

It was the year 1603. We can imagine life in the Americas through the description of Catalina:

> I entered the city of Lima, the Capital of the opulent Kingdom of Peru, with its one hundred and two cities, not counting the many villages, twenty-eight with the bishoprics and archbishoprics, a hundred and thirty-six procurator's offices and royal representatives (...). Lima has an archbishop and a cathedral similar to - but not as large as - the Cathedral of Seville...

After living in all the main cities in the Indies - from Cartagena to La Paz - and having been through all kinds of adventures, she reached Guamanga, Peru, where she was attacked and arrested after a fight. She revealed everything to the bishop who came to her cell to offer comfort and to talk to her:

> "This is the truth: I am a woman (...). I have wandered here and there, I have been on and off ships, I have bought and sold, I have killed, fought and kicked, and I have struck terror into many hearts before finding myself at the feet of Your Worship".
> He was a kind and holy man; throughout this conversation, that is, until around one o'clock, he remained breathless, without opening his mouth, without moving an eyelid, all the while listening to me and, when I had finished, he still remained speechless and cried tears of sorrow.

The following day the Bishop incredulously said to her "that this case was the most memorable of its kind which had happened to him in his life", and he concluded by saying: "So, is it all really true?" He then added: "Do not be surprised if the change I find in you leads me to doubt". Catalina replied: "If Your Excellency would like to remove this doubt by calling upon a few midwives, I am ready *(pronto)* to be put to the test". This was the year 1620. The examination to which Catalina/don Alonzo was submitted demonstrated that she was a virgin as well as being a woman. This created a sensation and her fame spread:

> News of the events spread. Many people came from far and wide and it was impossible to refuse visits from different authorities, which was very vexing both for myself and for His Excellency.
> Finally, after six days, His Excellency granted me leave to enter the convent of the Sisters of Santa Chiara di Guamanga, the only nun's convent in the district and there, I donned the habit. His Excellency left the house at my side and, a great crowd awaited us outside. I think that no-one in the city was absent from this event. It took us a long time to reach our destination. Finally, we reached the porter's lodge, because (...) it was impossible to enter the church; as soon as people found out, they had filled the church.

The whole religious community was present, and she was embraced by the nuns and by all those present. She received the sacraments, recited her orations and was led in procession to the choir:

> News of this event spread all around and there was great wonder throughout the Indies among those who had known me before and those who sooner or later had heard my story.

From Guamanga, Catalina set off for Lima, dressed as a nun on the order of the archbishop, and entered the convent of the Trinity:

> I stayed there for around two years and five months, until the message arrived from Spain to say that I was not and had never taken vows. I was immediately promised permission to leave the convent, to the great displeasure of all the nuns, and I set off for Spain (...). I continued my journey towards Santa Fe di Bogotá, in the Kingdom of New Granada. I visited the Archbishop, don Julián de Cortázar, who asked me insistently to remain there in the convent of my Order.
> I replied that I had neither Order nor religion, and that I merely wished to return to my native land where I would do what I felt was best for my redemption.

Finally, in 1624, she left Tenerife and set off for Spain. When she arrived in Cadiz:

> I went to Seville for two weeks, where I hid as well as I could from the crowds of people who flocked to see me dressed in man's clothing. After that, I went to Madrid and I stayed there for twenty days without being recognized. There, I was arrested by order of the vicar for reasons unknown, but the count of Olivares set me free.

After countless escapades, she arrived in Pamplona and then in Rome for the Holy Year. However, she was subsequently robbed in Piedmont and accused of being a spy, and she returned to Spain:

> *On my arrival (arrivato)* in Madrid, I presented myself to His Majesty, begging him to consider my services which I set out in a memorial which I handed over to the King. His Majesty then sent me to the Council of the Indies, where I went to present the documents which I had kept from all my many travels.

Catalina's request was heard and, in 1625, she was assigned a life annuity of eight hundred escudos. For the services rendered by Catalina during her twenty years as a soldier, the King granted her the title of "Standard-bearer doña Catalina de Erauso". However, driven by anxiety, she moved on once again, leaving Madrid for Barcelona. From there, she took a ship to Genoa and then went to Rome:

> I kissed the feet of His Holiness Urban VIII and I briefly recounted as best I could the story of my life, of my adventures, of my sex and of my virginity. His Holiness was surprised to hear such things and magnanimously permitted me to continue to live dressed as a man. He entreated me to continue to live an honest life and to avoid offending my fellow man, and always to bear in mind more than anything else the commandment of God, *non occides* - thou shalt not kill.

Her story also caused a sensation in Rome and Catalina was even registered by order of the Senate of Rome in a book of honour as a privileged citizen of the city:

> My case had become public dominion and I found myself surrounded by a huge crowd: distinguished personalties, princes, bishops, cardinals. Indeed, wherever I went, I found an open door...

After staying more than a month and a half in the city, without a moment's peace, she sailed from Ripa Grande to Naples, where she arrived on July 5 1626. Finally, she left definitively for Mexico where, in 1650, she fell ill on the road to Veracruz and died. The people who had so admired her as "a great and brave spirit" erected a splendid sepulchre in her honour and sculpted on the tombstone an epitaph befitting her passion for independence.

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1 In this respect, the work of Anna-Britta Hellbom is quite emblematic, *La participación cultural de las mujeres. Indias y Mestizas en el México precortesiano y postrevolucionario*, Etnografiska Museet, Stockholm; 1965.

2 Boyd-Bowman, Peter, *Indice geobiografico de 40.000 pobladores españoles de America en el siglo XVI*, Mexico; 1968.

3 Marie-Cécile Bénassy, "La vie spirituelle, Vous les saints", *Soeur Jeanne-Inés de la Croix*, n° 683, t. 143; January-February 1989.

4 This quotation and all those which followed are extracts from *The story of the standard-bearer nun* written by herself, Palermo, 1991. Joaquin Maria de Ferrer, who is also Basque, had the book published for the first time in Paris in 1829. There are many translations of the work of Catalina de Erauso, and the "Revue des Deux Mondes" published an edition in 1930.

Rosa di Lima

One of the phenomena of the history of the colonization of Peru which has up until today been the object of pious reflections but not of a proper scientific analysis is the fact that an inordinately high number of saintly figures lived at the same time in Lima within the short space of time between 1580 and 1620. From a cultural point of view, it may be said that saints are the result of their society and of their epoch. It is therefore possible to establish valid correlations between these saints and the socio-cultural environment which made them what they were. Indeed, it would be impossible to imagine that the presence of such holy figures would not have had a considerable impact on the society of Lima in those years. The analysis of the personality of Rosa di Santa Maria through her life and through the influence which she exerted on her contemporaries reveals a woman with a dynamic and extraordinary spirit.

From the first episodes of the conquest, the Spanish colonization of Peru was guided by the belief in divine intercession. It would be laborious to enumerate here the endless list of miraculous deeds recorded by the chronicles, which were variously regarded either as supernatural entreaties to found a city or to erect a temple, or as direct interventions by the Holy Virgin and by the saints to consolidate the hegemony of the conquistadors.

Towards the second half of the XVI century, the devotion of the people made it possible to start construction work on a considerable number of large churches and convents, the same buildings which gave Lima the monastic atmosphere which can still be felt in the old city today.

No-one would have expressed any surprise in 1578 at the suggestion of manipulation of people by spirits. The problem was rather knowing whether the spirit was an "angel of lights" or an "angel of darkness". At the time, Italian painters like Bitti were giving form and colour to the persistent visions which were part of the ethos generated by the religious imagery of Lima. These graphic catechisms, which were more efficient and perhaps less dangerous instruments for popular evangelisation than books, were to be seen everywhere on public buildings, churches and even on houses.

In fact, the same fervour which led people to visit temples or to represent mystical subjects in paint or in print also inspired a sense of ineffable curiosity for the Holy Scriptures and for texts which were considered as a threat to the guardians of dogma and doctrine, in that they would tend to lead the sensitivity of the faithful astray from the path of orthodoxy.

Rosa di Santa Maria has thus been relegated to hagiography and to popular legend and has never been the subject of a critical study. All the biographers of Rosa insist on her predestination for sainthood from her earliest childhood. Of course, we are naturally tempted to conclude that the path of her life was undertaken as a result of an individual decision on her part, all the more so as she was quite distinct from the female archetypes tolerated by the austere Baroque society of the time: damsel, wife, widow and nun.

Indeed, when the time came for Rosa to progress from maidenhood, she had to confront the wedding plans of her family, who hoped to marry her off for social advancement, according to the tradition of the time. By refusing the suitor chosen by her parents, she condemned herself to pay a dear price for her dissidence: insults, humiliation, mockery, both from her parents and from her brothers, as well as whippings and other maltreatments.

To the great surprise of her family and despite these physical threats, Rosa refused to marry and also refused to be shut up in a convent when this was offered as an alternative. The only concession she made was to don the habit of the "third Dominican order", which meant committing herself to a personal religious compromise. This condition was given the ambiguous title of "beata" (blessed), a rather dubious category which required women to devote themselves to the service of God and which at the same time meant they were no longer under the authority of the male laity. From this time onwards, therefore, Rosa was known in Lima as the "blessed one", a title which she sometimes regarded as mockery or as an insult. However, the confusing connotation of the title implied a model of piety and devotion which gave the "blessed" sister an aura of grace.

The whole city was no doubt well informed of the mystical passions which assailed Rosa and of the atrocious suffering which she imposed upon herself. However, we may wonder whether the people believed that sainthood was the product of such uncompromising discipline or vice-versa. As we shall see, the answer is to be found not only in the biography of Rosa but also in the different people who have sought to follow her example, people like Maria de Oliva, who belonged to that class of women who are disdainfully referred to as *bachilleras* (know-alls): it was said that the *bachilleras* were very fond of courtly literature and tales of chivalry, because in these stories it was men who begged and threw themselves at the feet of women.

Certainly, women were condemned to suffer in silence. In this respect, the discretion of Rosa appears to be more an imposed social restriction than a form of asceticism.

The example of Rosa did not go unobserved in a devout city where piety is considered as an eminently feminine attribute. Her bouts of ecstasy, her writings and her miracles were certainly not only considered as an invitation to contemplation, but they were interpreted first and foremost as a stimulus for emulation.

Little by little, religious life came to be considered by more and more women in Lima as a means of escaping from burdensome domestic duties and from marital authoritarianism. There were consequently numerous individual cases of exaggerated devotion with an emphasis on orthodoxy which not only frustrated any attempt to achieve sainthood but also put paid to the personal attempt to flee masculine domination.

The Inquisition set about destroying any symptom of dissidence and also sought to preserve the inexorable status of woman. The society which condemned such women by branding them as heretics was incapable of understanding that they were the product of the collective mentality and, at the same time, the most intransigent interpreters of this mentality. Their sin was quite simply that they adopted an excessive form of orthodoxy in a time of mystic extremism and radical fervour fuelled by certain forms of reading, iconography and traditions which we must take into account. Women saints and the *alumbradas* (the illuminated) did not appear by chance.

While Rosa di Santa Maria was adored at alters and Bartolomé Murillo was immortalizing her in his famous painting depicting the ecstasy of the saint, her close friends had started in the prisons of the Santo Uffizio to inflict upon her a torment which, to a great extent, was instrumental in her death.

Archives consulted

AGI : Archivio General de Indias, Seville
AGSD : Archivio General de Santo Domingo
AJ : Archivio General dei Gesuiti, Rome
BAV : Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rome

2. The life of Spanish women

2.1. The legal status of women in Spain in the XVI and XVII centuries

In order to understand the position of women within the process of conquest and colonization of the Americas, we must examine more closely the status of women in Spanish society in the XVI and XVII centuries. We can thus evaluate the extent of their participation in the American adventure and discover whether the discovery of the Indies represented a break in the traditional status of women in society.

Women and society

Our first difficulty is that of defining what we mean in general by "women". Indeed, this category cannot be dissociated from other variables such as the insertion of an individual into a given social class, geographical location (rural, urban), age-group or even religious beliefs. Notwithstanding these reservations, it may be said objectively that women are subjected to a set of standards, regardless of their origin or their situation within the social hierarchy. In this respect, legislation is a precious source of information for our study of society's ideal image of the role which should be played by women. Of course, we should need no reminding that this legislation, this ideal archetype and society itself were dictated by men and that, at the same time, women are the product of a long tradition. However, our task is not to retrace the origin of the role of women but to explain certain general characteristics.

The situation of women in Spain in the XVI and XVII centuries was determined by a series of general legal codes which formed a basis for Spanish law and which have accumulated over time. These codes are the *Siete partidas* (1265), the work of King Alfanso X of Castile, the Alcala decrees (1386), the Castile decrees (1484) and the *Leyes de Toro* (1505). The codes contain laws which administer the legal situation of women.

The traditional view of women at the time was that of a fragile person who needed protection, which could come either from the family and from institutions like the Church. Women were, physically and morally, weaker than men. In addition, they were considered to be less rational than men, more ready to fall victim to temptation, more emotional, and more surprisingly - even if this is consistent with the rest of the description - more violent than men.

According to the logic which said that women were more imperfect than men, certain characteristics were associated with women which depicted them as irrational beings. Furthermore, the people of the time still harked back to the idea inherited from classical times of the four humours. In this scheme of things, women were relegated to the warm and damp aspect of matter (negative and unrefined values), while men were associated with the dry, cold side of matter which is more conducive to speculative thought.

The problem of sexuality was in open contradiction to this idea that women were less rational than men. Indeed, the sexuality of men, as "rational" beings, was considered tacitly - but not clearly and openly - as naturally irrepressible, inasmuch as this was by definition considered an integral part of virility, even if it behoved men to keep their sexuality within the bounds of acceptable social discretion. In contrast, a woman's right to sexuality was confined to marriage and, in general, female sexuality was considered as dangerous.

This model would appear quite paradoxical. It means, in fact, that the honour of the family rested upon the shoulders of the person who was regarded as morally the weaker person, an irrational creature who was an easy prey to temptation - which, moreover, she embodied to an extent. It was the responsibility of the woman to protect the honour of the family by her moral conduct.

This whole ethos led many families among the elite to shut their daughters up in a convent, sheltered from the world, until the time when they could be married off. Cristobal Gutierrez Muñoz, for example, wrote in 1634 to his cousin, telling him that he had

> a beautiful seventeen-year old daughter (...) I have placed her in the monastery of the Encarnación (in Potosi, present-day Bolivia) and I am saving her little by little until I can marry her[1].

In Spain in the XVI and XVII centuries, women were under parental guardianship and, once married, they fell under the guardianship of their husband. Women who stayed single remained under the guardianship of their father until they died... Consequently, women could not undertake any transaction, acquisition, sale, etc., without the legal authorization of their husband or father. Nonetheless, once given this authorization, they could enjoy all their legal freedoms.

All goods contributed in the form of a marriage dowry remained the property of the woman and could not be alienated without her permission. Although the husband was entitled to administer the dowry, he was nonetheless obliged to repay the total value thereof in the event of the dissolution of the marriage or to provide for the restitution of the dowry in his will. The husband was expected to pledge his own present and future possessions in order to safeguard those of his wife. Furthermore, he undertook not to alienate, gamble or squander his wife's possessions, in which case he would be made to stand trial.

A clear distinction was made between the dowry and any goods accumulated during the marriage (half of which became the property of the woman on the death of her husband).

In addition to this, the husband-to-be would very often give his future wife a certain sum of money - called the deposit - which was directly incorporated into the dowry. In practice, this sum was paid when the dowry was received. This voluntary deposit was often cited as the recompense given by the husband for the "purity of extraction and virginity of his wife". If the wife died without bearing offspring, the family could even claim from the husband payment of the sum corresponding to the dowry and the deposit which had been given. Even if the dowry was designed as a way of helping the young couple to embark on their new life together, it is also important to emphasise the function of the dowry as a guarantee for the woman in the event of widowhood or abandon.

Within the couple, the husband and the wife retained separate rights of ownership, together with the right to dispose freely of their property. As the system of inheritance was bilateral, children inherited in parallel from their father and mother.

In this way, on the death of her husband, the widow would inherit half of the goods accumulated during their life together in addition to her dowry, together with any property which she had acquired. The law gave the wife an undeniable economic superiority over the children with regard to any potential entitlements. One can thus imagine the important status of the widow when, as was often the case, she became the executrix of the will of her husband. Indeed, she played a central role in the administration and preservation of the family estate. Although this situation was more a feature of the middle and upper classes (who were able to afford a dowry for their daughters), it also affected the lower classes in situations which involved any form of property (house, shop, land...).

Legislation on women and emigration

The legislation on emigrants leaving for the "Indies" must be placed within the context of a legal system which sought to protect people. This explains why unaccompanied single women were at first forbidden to emigrate.

Paradoxically, the same desire to provide protection led the crown to forbid married men to emigrate without their family. In order to be allowed to leave for the Indies, any man had to submit a legal authorization from his wife! However, the couple could not be separated for more than three years. Anyone transgressing this rule risked imprisonment and was forced to rejoin his family. To allow a man to stay for longer than three years, the wife who was still living in Spain had to renew her authorization:

> I want you to send me an authorization for four years; you must do this at town council, specifying that, since I am here (in America) for your interest and for mine, you give me your authorization and that it is your wish to grant me this authorization[2].

This certified authorization had to remain in the possession of the man who was required to show it whenever requested by the authorities in America.

If the crown decided to become involved in this matter, it was because of the many women who had been left abandoned in Castile while their husbands had gone to "seek their fortune" in the "Indies"[3]. In fact, husbands who set out as "explorers" tended to have their family rejoin them only when they had accumulated a little nest-egg. These women were virtually abandoned, even if they were not sentimentally forlorn. Moreover, this kind of separation could in practise result in pure and simple desertion, as shown by the fear expressed by the women themselves. A colonizer in Mexico in the XV century wrote to his wife whom he had left in Castile and had not seen for years:

> You should remember that it is more for you than for me that I have come (to the Indies) to make my fortune...[4]

Although cases of couples keeping up transatlantic correspondence were not rare, separation was nonetheless an unpalatable prospect for women. Indeed, for many of them, separation in fact left them quite remorselessly abandoned in Castile. This may be the cause of a demographic phenomenon which specifically affected Old Castile in the XVI and XVII centuries, that is, the proportionately high number of "widows" who lived in the city and, to a lesser extent, in rural areas. This could be attributed to the number of wives of soldiers who had gone off to the wars. At any rate, we can assume that women who had been abandoned for a considerable length of time by emigrants were also considered by the authorities as "widows". Furthermore, there is no doubt that a considerable number of men opted for emigration as a means of escaping conjugal life. A colonizer in Chile[5] declared in his will that he was leaving nothing to his wife - which was illegal - because he had been forced to marry her, and that he had never lived with her because he had left Spain immediately after the wedding. Given that America was "free" from many of the social obligations, especially at the beginning, it was the ideal place of refuge in this kind of situation.

Despite the many violations of the laws, there were frequent cases in which married men were obliged to return to Spain or to have their wives travel to join them in America, and masses of these files on "marital life" accumulated in the archives of the Indies in Seville. As a case in point, a colonizer in Mexico who had left his wife in Seville without obtaining due legal authorization wrote to her in desperation:

> I had already made up my mind to go back to Spain to fetch you (and to return to America together), when I was arrested, accused of being married (without my wife), imprisoned and humiliated (...) I managed to obtain a special authorization (...) I beseech you (...) for the love of God, let nothing prevent you from coming here to rejoin me, because my salvation and yours depend on this...[6]

2.2. Women and their involvement in emigration

Female emigration

Emigration to America is traditionally considered essentially as a male phenomenon. However, although this tendency was predominant during the first years of conquest, research has clearly demonstrated the previously unsuspected extent of feminine involvement in emigration from the end of the XV century onwards.

In a study which has since become a reference work[7], the American linguist Peter Boyd-Bowman followed the destiny of almost of 55,000 Spanish emigrants to America between 1494 and 1600. He estimates that this figure represents around 20% of the total number of emigrants - whether legal or clandestine - for the period in question. Far from being absent from this sample, the number of women involved was quite considerable and increased steadily as the conquest was followed by colonization (see table).

The rules applied to the emigration of women were the same as those for men, with the exception of a number of measures specifically concerning women. In the initial stages, the legislation would appear to have been rather permissive and, in 1511, a royal decree of Ferdinand the Catholic authorized anyone to set out for America who so desired. The only administrative formality people were expected to carry out was to give their Christian name and surname. However, from 1518 onwards, a series of measures were taken to regulate emigration, which went as far as requiring a certificate of "purity of blood" - a sort of certificate of religious orthodoxy - from 1552 onwards, during the reign of Philip II. This certificate was needed to secure the "license to travel", the authorization to go America which was personal, non-transferable and valid for only two years. These authorizations to travel have been preserved to this day in the *Contratación* section of the General Archives of the Indies in Seville.

Emigrants 1493-1600[8]

	Total	**Women**
1493-1519	5,481	308
1520-1539	13,262	845
1540-1559	9,044	1,408
1560-1579	17,586	5,013
1580-1600	9,508	2,472
1493-1600	**54,881**	**10,118**

Married men could not obtain this licence without first securing the authorization of their wives. Unaccompanied single women could not normally obtain the authorization, a part from "washerwomen", a title which was certainly a euphemism... The simplest way to emigrate for a single woman was to therefore travel as the "servant" of some other person. In addition to allowing women travellers to get round the ban on unaccompanied single women emigrants, this offered a means of avoiding the administrative formalities involved in obtaining a license.

In 1603, for example, the "*licenciado*" (scholar) Fernando Talaverano, who was leaving to occupy a seat on the colonial administration board in America, obtained a license to travel from the *Casa de la Contratación* in Seville. This license however, was valid for 21 persons: the "*licenciado*" himself, his wife, four sons, eight servants, four serving-women and three slaves[9].

A colonizer in Mexico, for example, wrote to his brother who had remained in Spain because he could not obtain the license to travel. The colonizer expressed astonishment at his being unable to secure a license because all it took was "*to have a word with the captain of a ship and, in exchange for a little money, anyone who wanted could come...*"[10]. The flow of clandestine travellers would appear to have been significant but it is difficult to evaluate. In 1634, a member of the Finance Council, Manuel de Hinojosa, wrote that he had witnessed the departure of the last *armada* to South America, and that almost 12,000 people had gone on board, most of whom had no authorization. Furthermore, from 1604 onwards, a royal decree condemned the fact that over 600 women had left for Americas with the last fleet headed for New Spain[11], although the crown had issued only 50 authorizations ...

In all probability, the figures for female emigration are underestimates. However, they do give us an approximate idea of the situation or, at least, they indicate the general trend. Most of those who left came from the south: of the 8,893 women who left Spain between 1540 and 1600, 55.7% were Andalusian, 13.7% came from Estremadura and 16.3% came from New Castile... Southern Spain represented as much as 85.7% of total female emigration to America.

A study carried out on a group of 1,909 Spanish emigrants to America who made the crossing between 1595 and 1598[12] has given a more precise idea of the "archetypal emigrant". 35.3% of this group was made up of women, most of whom were married, were travelling with their husband or were heading to America to be reunited with their husband. To a lesser extent, the group included widows who were going to join their family and single women travelling as "servants". Only 14 women from this sample of 675 emigrants were travelling alone and unaccompanied. The general archetype which emerges is therefore a married woman of around 32 years of age travelling with her husband and two young children.

As regards the destinations of travellers to America, these varied according to the period studied. In the initial stages, most female emigrants headed for the island of Santo Domingo, which was considered more civilized and therefore more suitable for women. From 1521 onwards, with the conquest of Mexico, Mexico City and the other cities in the region (especially Puebla de Los Angeles) which had recently been founded became the preferred focus of the flow of emigrants. The discovery of Peru had the same impact, and Peru thus became the destination chosen by most of the sample described above. Throughout the XVI and XVII centuries, Mexico and Peru were no doubt the two main poles of attraction for Spanish emigrants. Indeed, at the end of the XVI century, the population of Mexico City and Lima had reached between 50 and 60,000 inhabitants. Similarly, the city of Potosi (in present-day Bolivia), which was a dependency of colonial Peru, had attracted a population of over 120,000 inhabitants.

Why embark on a new life in America?

In many cases, what started out as internal migration (from a small city on the Castilian plain to the great cities of Seville) could on occasion develop into transatlantic migration. Indeed, transatlantic migration is part of a more widespread movement, which was prevalent at that time in Spain, of movement from north to south of populations on the peninsula. America therefore appeared as a new possibility offered to these migrants.

Therefore, and partly as a result of the above movement, regions served by a superior infrastructure of lines of communication were generally more open to the influence of the written word. Where men go, books surely follow.

The education of women was limited to reading, mostly within the family. It was the mother who was entrusted with this task, which consisted mostly of pious literature. Several sectors involved in commerce or in handicrafts[13] and, to an extent, rural sectors would acquire in this way new territories and lands which opened up perspectives which had been unsuspected until then.

Emigration was accordingly conditioned by one of the forms taken by the written word: letters. Whether read or recounted to all the members of the family, such letters or the news which they contained circulated throughout the locality and thus gave a concrete and tangible form to the hopes and aspirations which had until then been mere fantasies.

> I beg you to try to convince Señora Maria Salazar on my behalf to come to live in this country, and tell her that she should not fear either the roads or the ocean, because as soon as she arrives here, she will be as happy as a queen and she will banish Santa Olalla from her mind as if that village had never existed because the women here do not weave, work or do any form of cooking or any such chores. Instead, they spend their time sitting chatting with friends who drop in to see them[14]...

This type of letter, of which there are many, confirm all the stories which were read or listened to, and added to the growing wave of men, and more and more women, who set off for the New World in search of the opportunities for social betterment denied them in Spain during the XVI and XVII centuries.

The crossing

We have already mentioned that certain formalities had to be carried out prior to departure: the certificate of "purity of blood" and the royal authorization (cédula). These documents had to be presented in Seville to the *Casa de Contratactión*, which delivered the definitive document which gave permission to embark, the license.

The decrees of October 1564 limited departures to two per year with the two fleets. Those headed for New Spain left at the end of April or the beginning of May, while those headed for Nombre de Dios (Panama) and Cartagena (present-day Colombia) left in August. In the XVI century, the same crossing - from San Lucar de Barrameda, a port near Seville, to Santo Domingo - lasted at least one and a half months, while it took some twenty more days to reach the other American ports such as Veracruz. To get to Peru, travellers had to cross Panama and then take the boat to Callao, the port of Lima. From the XVII century onwards, a direct link was opened between Spain and the ports of the River Plate.

The number of passengers able to embark with each ship changed significantly during the XVI and XVII centuries. Between 1506 and 1560 each boat transported an average of 15 to 20 passengers. However, from the end of the XVI century onwards, this average rose to 30-40 passengers. The "common" passengers travelled in collective compartments, which explains the insistence in private letters and in other sources on the potential dangers for the honour of ladies travelling be sea. The allusions made to the disregard of seamen for the virtue of women justifies this leitmotif of the need for women to be accompanied on their journey. At the same time, we find here all the ideology which surrounded women, those fragile creatures who needed to be protected from other people... and from themselves:

Ladies of your condition find themselves in great danger when sailing to the Indies, unless you show great prudence.[15]

People who could afford it could take a private compartment, thus avoiding cohabitation with other passengers.

2.3. Women in America

The activities of women in America bear witness to the disparity between the view of women which emerged from the legal texts of the time and the actual condition of women in the colonies.

Women were present in all sectors of colonial society, despite the deep-rooted idea which held that Spanish women in America were "of necessity" part of the elite. In this respect, women shared the same fate as men. During the initial period of conquest, the colonial "booty" had been shared out unevenly among the conquistadors and the first colonizers, thus creating several different levels within the group of Europeans. During the first two centuries of conquest, there was no crystallization of the dynamic social, economic and cultural structure which tends to create an ethnic stratification of colonial society, although this trend was already present. Consequently, Europeans could be found on all rungs of the social ladder, including farming and handicrafts - in which they worked alongside the other ethnic groups - even though they clearly monopolized the upper echelons of society. Spanish women could thus be found throughout the entire spectrum of the social structure.

Women had been present in America from the very outset. As a result, they were also present in expeditions undertaken to discover and colonize territories.

A letter addressed from Isabel de Guevara to the regent of Castile, doña Juana, in 1556, attests to this female participation in the conquest of new territories. She tells of how the women who had come with the first governor of the River Plate (present-day Argentina) had saved the army thanks to their constant care. Of the 1,500 men who set out, a thousand died of hunger while the women healed the sick and fed - with whatever they could find - the 500 survivors. In this episode, the women provided the benefit of their traditional role as providers of food and, in the words of Isabel de Guevara herself, added the "advantages" inherent in their feminine "nature":

> The men have reached such a state of fatigue that only the women are carrying the burden of all the different chores, whether it be washing clothes, caring for the wounded, feeding, washing, doing rounds, carrying crossbows (...) and (...) making those soldiers stand who were able, distributing weapons and giving them orders, because during all this time, as the women are able to live on little food, they would not crumble into the state into which the men had fallen...[16]

Even if this letter, written as it was with the purpose of obtaining a royal favour, is exaggerating the facts, doña Isabel is not wrong to say that "without the women, we would all have perished from one day to the next". This situation was repeated in several regions, and the image of the woman educated to remain passive and weak therefore did not square with reality, when the contingencies of real life impose themselves upon socially acceptable cultural precepts.

Another element which is often neglected, probably because the sources are particularly silent in this respect, concerns military garrisons, where there can be no doubt that soldiers lived with their wives[17]. We know how life was organized in these garrisons, thanks to "military" sources. This is certainly one of the reasons why references to women are exceptional and such references are generally found in documents where they are mentioned incidentally. Similarly, the documents on soldiers dispatched to war, which is a source from which we may expect women to be excluded by definition, can sometimes contain surprises. In a letter from the King to the Governor of Chile in the middle of the XVII century, the monarch explains to the governor that he has excluded married men from the troops being sent to the peninsula "to avoid overloading the fleet", which would appear to indicate quite conclusively that married men would otherwise travel with their wives.

It is interesting to note that, in perilous situations like that of a fort facing an enemy frontier, the traditional "feminine" role of provider of food becomes confused with the role of active defence of the community, a function which is normally entrusted to men. An episode which took place during the war between the Spanish and the Araucani Indians in the south of Chile once again depicts women as participating in the same way as described in the letter from Isabel de Guevara. The men had left the fort to scour the countryside, while a group of women had gone out to harvest the surrounding fields. This implies that the women had to defend themselves alone if attached by the Indians, which actually did happen.[18] Although women are rarely mentioned in accounts and chronicals, because they are usually absent from battles and military clashes, a number of documents like this one demonstrate that women did play a part in activities from which they are traditionally excluded.

In the cases cited above, the women have an active role, more or less the same as that of the men and which, in certain circumstances, is connected with the conquest of American territories.

Although women had a specific role to play in wartime, their role was rather different from that of male warriors, whether Indian or Spanish. In fact, women sometimes participated as "soldiers", and Spanish women are sometimes mentioned in the various chronicals as spoils appropriated by the Indians. While for large numbers of Spanish men, capture meant death or slavery, Spanish women who were captured were divided among the worriers and became their "wives". This situation was a feature of the frontier territories where the Spanish forces had not yet succeeded in crushing Indian resistance. Although this happened in only a minority of cases, it nonetheless reveals the specific role played by women, which may be considered in parallel with the fate of Indian women, that is, the women of the vanquished people in hispanicized territories. It was common for Spanish men to take Indians concubines, but this never - with a few rare exceptions - ended in marriage.

Nonetheless, the structure of Hispanic American society in the XVI and XVII centuries was not the structure of a society at war. The period of conquest (end of XV - beginning of XVI century) quickly turned to the "colonial" period as all resistance on the part of the native population had been crushed.

We have only dealt here with Spanish women. It must be said, however, that colonialism showed up the weakness of womankind in absolute terms, regardless of any particular social context. The legislation of the time allows us to ascertain the ideal role-model imposed upon Spanish women in general, whatever their social status. Moreover, the multi-ethnic phenomenon had a profound effect on this role-model by changing it and adapting it to the new structure of American society.

The Spanish model was, of course, decisive in setting the standard, but the values of honour and virtue, which are intimately associated with women, underwent several new interpretations in this society in which the Spanish victors and the vanquished Indians lived in confrontation. In general terms, it may be said that the traditional Spanish concept of women became even more dissociated from reality when transposed to America.

On the one hand, the situation of Spanish women was quite unlike that of Indian women who, in the initial stages, represented the vast majority of all colonial societies, or that of black women. With the exception of Santo Domingo, where parish registers reveal that there was a considerable proportion of mixed Spanish-Indian marriages, the relations which characterized these two groups were those of concubinage: the mestizo population at the start of the colonization process was essentially composed of illegitimate children.

Even though the number of Spanish women had become sufficient to allow the men to father legitimate families, concubinage with Indian women - often with women who were servants or who worked on the land of a Spanish landowner - remained common practice. All the preconceived notions about the salacity and unchastity of Indian women, which were a constant theme in the mentality and literature of the time, are both a contributory factor and a justification for this state of affairs.

In any case, this form of union may in certain cases have concealed something more than a simple sexual relationship. Indeed, a Spanish man could establish a form of patronage with a high-ranking Indian and thus benefit from the influence of the latter over his subjects and take one of his daughters as his wife "after the Indian fashion", in a union which was therefore illegitimate according to the Catholic view. This was the case for those Spaniards who married young Indian girls of the Inca race in Peru, like Garcilaso de la Vega, father of the famous mestizo writer of the "*Comentarios Reales*". The same phenomenon was repeated on a smaller scale in other American territories in the initial stages of conquest. Two companions of Pedro de Valdivia, the conquistador of Chile, partnered - in a union which was not recognized by the Church - two Cacique women, Doña Elvira, the Cacique of Talagante, and Doña Mariana Pichulién, the Cacique of Chacabuco. The authority of these two women extended over several territories and small groups. Can such cases be regarded as concubinage or cultural adaptation, insofar as the conquistadors adopted "the Indian fashion" of matrimony. Indeed, in the two cases cited above, the Indians of Chacabuco and Talagante were given as *Encomienda*[19] to the descendants of these conquistadors, whereby union with the natives turned out to be particulary profitable to any such embracers of "local customs"... However, in most cases, the situation of Indian women was not that of a cacique, and the only form of relationship with a Spaniard open to Indian women was concubinage, a fact which characterized the

difference between the archetypal Spanish woman of virtue and the nature of Indian men.

In such cases, as in the case of women who were taken during the wars of conquest as "spoils of war", as mentioned above, Indian women were the "element" which made it possible to establish a form of contact between the two groups, the Spanish on the one hand and the Indians on the other. Indeed, given her sexual status, Indian women were the only intermediary between the two cultures.

On the other hand, the traditional moral view of Spanish women did not even correspond to all Spanish women in colonial society. Illegitimate children, which were typical of the relations between Spanish men and Indian women, were not unknown among the white population. In this respect, it should be borne in mind that Spanish standards of behaviour played a lesser role in American society. Indeed, religion was relegated to a minor role.

Letters from religious orders[20], and from the King's bishops[21] testify to the glaring lack of priests to dispense the essential sacraments in many regions of America.

The parish registers[22] attest indisputably to the rise in the proportion of illegitimate Spanish children compared to the number in Castile at that time. The liberation of social mores consequent upon conquest should therefore not be considered simply as a sexual expression of colonial domination. It is rather a general phenomenon affecting all levels of the population, whether European or non-European.

It should also be noted that the traditional idea of the woman as a creature to be protected, together with the corollary of this concept, the idea that women must be supervised and confined, either at home or in a convent, is an ideal to which only the elite aspired. In fact, it was only the elite who could afford to pay for a dowry or to pay for their daughter to live in a convent[23] during her years of celibacy. Furthermore, it was only the upper classes who could afford to have any young girl who was not in a convent chaperoned by servants and accompanied everywhere, thus keeping a constant watch on their daughter and on her virtue and reducing any risk of placing either in jeopardy.

The situation was quite different for women in underprivileged sectors of Spanish society. As soon as any woman in such classes became involved in any economic activity - which was necessary for their own survival and for that of their family - they came into contact with the world at large. They thus became independent and found their reputation compromised as a result of the many opportunities to give in to the temptation not to be "prudent". Society is apprehensive of independent women, because they are a deviation from the social norm. The pejorative and rather lascivious view of the widow as a woman of "easy virtue", as the only woman with any real economic power within colonial society, should perhaps be correlated to the image surrounding the idea of femininity itself. Indeed, women in certain privileged white social classes, (pharmacists, bakers...) are a challenge to this patronizing view which sees women as the archetypal "baby doll" inherited from the Spanish model.

Archives consulted and symbols used in the text

AAS : Archivo del Arzobispado de Santiago, Chile
AGI : Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla
AJ : Archivio Generale dei Gesuiti, Roma
AN : Archivo Nacional, Chile
BAV : Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Roma

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1 Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Contratación 367 - Bienes de difuntos.

2 OTTE, Enrique, *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias*, Seville, Escuela de Estudios Hispanoamericanos, 1988, p.283, letter sent from Bogata by Baltassar de Valladolid to his wife, Clara de los Angeles, in Toledo, 1591.

3 Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Contratación - Bienes de difuntos.

4 OTTE, E., op.cit., p. 114, letter sent by Gaspar de los Reyes, a colonizer in Mexico, to his wife, 1586.

5 Archivo General de Indias (AGI), Contratación 406B - Bienes de difuntos.

6 OTTE, Letter 95, p. 112, Juan Diaz, a colonizer in Mexico, to his wife in Spain, 1586.

7 BOYD-BOWMAN, Peter, *Geo-biographical index of 40,000 emigrants to the Indies*, Mexico-Bogota, 1966-68. Subsequently supplemented by numerous articles.

8 Based on a sample by P. Boyd-Bowman.

9 AGI, Contratación 5277, License of Lic. Fernando Talaverano Gallegos.

10 OTTE, op.cit., p. 206, letter sent in 1586.

11 Mexico and present-day Central America.

12 BOYD-BOWMAN, P., "*Emigrants to the New World : A profile*" in First Images of America, Ucla press, 1976. 1909 travellers about whom certain data is available (age, place of birth, destination).

13 The essentially urban origin of emigrants to America appears to an extent to have favoured these two groups.

14 OTTE, op., cit, p.383, letter from an artisan (sword-maker) in Lima to his brother in Santa Olalla (Toledo), 1570.

15 OTTE. E., op. cit., p. 29.

16 *Cartas de Indias*, 1496-1585, Madrid, Ministry of Grain, 1877. Letter from Isabel de Guevara to Doña Juana, regent of Castile.

17 AGI, Audiencia de Chile. The permanent state of war in Chile during the entire colonial period made the problem of garrison management a recurrent theme in the correspondence between governors and the city. A considerable proportion of this correspondence has been preserved in this section of the AGI. Documents on this theme can also be found in the *Patronato*, fascicle 28.

18 OVALLE, Alonso de, *Historica Relacion del Reyno de Chile*, Rome; 1646.

19 System whereby the Spanish obtained the authorization of the King to have a group of Indians work for them in exchange for evangelization. In practice, *encomienda* became a veiled form of slavery.

20 Particulary from Jesuits. The archives of the order in Rome (AJ), at the end of the Letterae Annuae, contain the recurrent theme of the lack of involvement and influence of the church and the liberation of morals with which priests were faced. See particularly AJ Letterae Annuae - 6 (1634), and also the parish annals in the *Processus Consistoriales*, Vatican Archives (AV), Archivio Consistoriale.

21 See BAV, LIZANA E., *Colleción de documentos historicos*, t. I: *Cartas de los Obispos al Rey*, Santiago; 1919.

22 Archivo Arzobispal de Santiago (AAS), Chile, *Libros de Bautismo de Españoles*. National Archives, Santiago, Chile. See also for Guadalajara, the study of CARRASCO, I.

23 Generally speaking, only white women were admitted to convents.

3. Work in progress

Italy

Professor Consuelo Varela and Professor Airaldi, the Director of the Chair of Medieval History at the University of Genoa, with the help of distinguished researchers and writers, including Doctor Carla Andreoli, a journalist with the Italian daily newspaper "Avanti", have produced a reference work on the figure of Isabel la Catolica as a female innovator and historical protagonist.

Spain

Numerous research initiatives on "The structure of Latin-American society and the elements which have been neglected through the centuries: the past and present of women within the social structure of America" have been undertaken by the following group of lecturers and researchers in various Spanish universities, mostly in Andalusia: María Dolores Fuentes Bajo, Professor at the University of Granada, María Justina Sarabia Viejo, Professor at the University of Seville, Isabel Arenas y Frutos, Associate Professor at the University of Vuelvas, Pilar Alberti Manzanares, Researcher at the Universitá Conplutense in Madrid, Carmen Cebrián González, Researcher at the University of Seville, Milagros Ciudad Suarez, Researcher at the "School of Spanish-American Studies" in Seville, and Carmen Lloret Miserach of the University of Seville are currently working on the presence of women in Latin America, without neglecting the role of African women deported to the new continent.

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