

WOMEN OF OUR NATION:  
GENDER, RACE, AND CHRISTIAN INDIAN IDENTITY  
IN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO, 1753-1867

by

JESSICA LAUREN CRIALES

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Women of Our Nation:  
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This dissertation uses a comparative framework to research and analyze religious identity among indigenous women who joined self-governed Christian Indian communities in the United States and Mexico in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as well as the role of gendered rhetoric in the creation and maintenance of those communities. Focusing primarily on convents for indigenous nuns in Mexico and two Christian Indian tribes, Brothertown and Stockbridge, in the United States, it argues that women in these communities leveraged the dual nature of their identities – as both indigenous and Christian – in order to gain recognition, authority, and autonomy within and beyond their communities. By becoming abbesses, schoolteachers, or simply “exemplary Christians,” these women gained influence over colonial and national authorities based on their Christian identity, while advocating for indigenous people and strengthening indigenous networks. They adapted to changing economic conditions and used creative strategies for fundraising, thereby ensuring the financial stability of their communities. They also asserted new understandings of the relationship between ethnic identity and allegiance that diverged from the perspectives of colonial and national officials, as well as indigenous men. In both regions, however, increasing nationalism and anti-indigenous or anticlerical land policies on the federal level caused the suppression of independent Christian Indian communities and exposed Native women within these groups to the full brunt of gendered and racialized oppression under national expansion. The efficacy of women’s strategies based on their membership within these communities, therefore, was also curtailed. Overall, the broad

similarities in indigenous women's responses to colonial and imperial rule in multiple locations suggest that gender and ethnicity, more than geopolitical context, shaped indigenous women's strategies for survival across the Americas.

This dissertation departs from existing studies of Christian Indian communities not only through its focus on women and its comparative perspective, but also through its chronological framework, which spans both the late colonial and early national periods. Part 1 of this dissertation examines indigenous girls' experiences in missionary-run schools in the mid-eighteenth century, where these students were instrumental in creating the networks which would provide the foundation for Christian Indian communities. Part 2 of this dissertation focuses on the emergence of these communities in the late eighteenth century, and the ways in which gendered rhetoric, as used by both indigenous communities and Euro-American colonial officials, supported or detracted from the efforts to create these communities. Finally, Part 3 of this dissertation looks at women's lives within Christian Indian communities and examines the specific strategies for survival and advocacy developed by women within Christian Indian communities. Overall, this dissertation demonstrates both the possibilities and the limits of Native women's influence and agency based on their dual identity as Christian and indigenous.

## **Dedication**

To my parents,  
my first and best teachers;

and to Frankie,  
who came along at the start of this project;  
to Olivia,  
who came along at the end;  
and to Luis,  
who was by my side for it all.

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own; it belongs to the people who lived it, and this dissertation was only made possible through the generosity and openness of their descendants.

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No woman is an island, and my work has benefited from the critique and feedback of numerous colleagues. Rutgers has provided a warm, friendly, and collegial atmosphere of growth that was apparent from my first day of coursework. After I moved to the Chicago area, I greatly appreciated the flexibility of many Rutgers staff and professors who allowed me to participate in various programs long-distance, including Andy Urban, Mark DiGiacomo, and Teresa DelCorso. The Newberry Library was my first academic landing spot when I arrived in Chicago, and I was thankful for the librarians' kindness as well as the stimulating seminar sessions they offered, particularly the Religion and Culture in the Americas series. Members of Northwestern University's North American Religion Workshop (NARW) welcomed me with open arms and gave me helpful feedback on chapter 6; members of the University of Chicago's Religions in America (RAME) workshop did the same on an article.

I attended the Oaxaca Summer Institute the summer after my first year of graduate school: it was tantalizing introduction to Oaxaca and got me hooked on Mexican history. The 2015 Colonial Christian Missions and Their Legacies conference was a great experience and helped facilitate my first peer-reviewed publication; my thanks especially to conference

organizer Claire McLisky. The participants of the Southwest Seminar (2015, 2019) were incredibly encouraging, gave me wonderful feedback, and have proven to be a continued source of support along the way – Jay T. Harrison’s advice on applying for grants stands out in particular. Many other friends and colleagues have helped with research and writing; I want to especially thank fellow grad students Brian Brown, Tara Malanga, Megan McDonie, and Naomi Sussman, who copied or photographed certain documents for me during their own research trips. Kallie Kosc graciously shared her 2019 dissertation on Stockbridge women with me; I am grateful for her collegiality and openness. Through the Lilly Fellows Program, Lisa DeBoer and Michael Patella served as excellent mentors; Lisa’s phone calls in particular helped keep me grounded in the early years of grad school.

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## Introduction

“My beloved father,” the 1782 letter began. “I am writing to inform Your Excellency that this new foundation and holy community has decided...to celebrate spiritual fraternity with its benefactors.” Specifically, the “fraternal” relationship would involve wealthy donors, such as the recipient of this letter, the viceroy of Mexico, sending money to a specific convent in Oaxaca in exchange for prayers.

This arrangement was the brainchild of Madre María Teodora de San Agustín, the first abbess of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles, commonly known as the Cacicas’ Convent in reference to the fact that it only accepted *cacicas*, meaning indigenous women of noble status. Although she signed her letters as “your daughter and servant in Christ,” there was no biological relationship between Madre Teodora and the viceroy. In fact, Madre Teodora, born María Salazar, was an indigenous woman from central Mexico, who had spent her early years as a nun in Mexico City’s Corpus Christi convent. When she wrote to the viceroy, she had just arrived in Oaxaca, where she would help found the Cacicas’ Convent, the first convent in Mexico to be inhabited exclusively by indigenous women from the start.

“We know [the bearer of this letter] to be a woman of good moral character and have reason to believe she is a sincere Christian,” several residents of Onondaga, New York, wrote in 1821. They encouraged nearby churches to give donations to this woman with “the most entire confidence that it will be faithfully appropriated according to their wishes” and that their charitable offerings would “do considerable good.”

The letter bearer’s Christian name was Mary Doxtator, although her mother called her Kauknausquoh. She was a Stockbridge Indian who had been educated by Quakers in Philadelphia as a young girl. She then returned to her native New York to help share what she had learned with the women of her tribe, especially weaving, sewing, and literacy. Doxtator’s spinning school, funded in part by the donations gathered by local white churches, increased the production of fabric by Stockbridge women, thereby helping free them from dependency on exploitative traders for their clothing. Doxtator would go on to become a legal representative of her tribe in treaty negotiations with the United States. Along with the rest of the Stockbridge, Doxtator practiced Christianity her entire life while remaining close to her familial roots.

As a member of a Christian Indian community, she thus fully inhabited the intersection of Christian and indigenous identity. Her positionality as a woman, a Native person, and a demonstrably orthodox Christian earned her access to a unique set of tools and strategies, allowing her to leverage her reputation as a good Christian Indian woman to influence political and religious authorities. Notably, she then used this power to support and secure indigenous representation and autonomy within prejudicial systems.

In the fall of 1763, a young woman named Sarah Wyacks (Mohegan) journeyed on horseback from Lebanon, Connecticut, to coastal Rhode Island. She was traveling from her boarding school, Moor's Indian Charity School, to a village near her hometown, a trip of about twenty-five miles. She had been sent by the school's founder, Eleazar Wheelock, to accompany a new student to the school: Hannah Poquiantup, a Niantic Indian. The two would return to a school in the Connecticut woods that was home to around seventy students over a ten-year period, including sixteen female students, who received training in literacy and domestic skills. Wheelock's goal was to train a cadre of Indian missionaries, all male, who would be accompanied by Native Christian wives. While few female students lived in accordance with Wheelock's plan, they proved particularly adept at negotiating his control over them.

A pregnant indigenous woman, traveling into Mexico City in the 1750s, fell ill. As a migrant in the Spanish colonial capital, her position was especially precarious. Luckily, she was placed in the home of an indigenous woman who attended the church of San Gregorio, next to the School of Our Lady of Guadalupe for indigenous girls. According to the testimony of an alumna of that school, the indigenous woman was cared for during the remainder of her pregnancy by women from the San Gregorio/Guadalupe complex, and remained a member of the community for several years afterwards. Guadalupe students and alumna were often involved in similar situations, helping provide for indigenous people in need. They helped poor native girls acquire dowries, wrote letters of recommendations for jobs for indigenous men, defended longstanding indigenous Catholic religious practices in Mexico City, and advanced their own definition of Guadalupe school identity.

Most importantly, the female students at the school helped strengthen pan-Indian identity across the region, facilitating conversations among people of different ethnic or tribal and linguistic affiliations and building a strong network of indigenous connections using colonial institutions as central nodes. Moreover, they creatively adapted European gender norms to build relationships with missionaries and exert their own agency.

Despite its promising start, the fortunes of the Cacicas' Convent would decline over the years. The convent continued to accept indigenous women as nuns into the mid-nineteenth century, and maintained connections with the other convents for indigenous women in Mexico. Nevertheless, its local reputation as an indigenous institution faded in the years after Mexican independence, when the new government discouraged expressions of indigenous identity. Anti-clerical policies also impacted the convent. The

Women in the Christian Indian communities of Brothertown and Stockbridge flourished in the early part of the nineteenth century, becoming teachers, earning money, and taking an active role in tribal governance. As pressure from settler colonialism mounted, however, women's roles in publicly-documented spheres began to decline. The Brothertown Tribal Court, for example, shifted from having equal representation from men and women in the early decades, to the proceedings being run entirely by men by the 1830s.

nuns of the Cacicas' Convent were forced to share quarters with other religious communities starting in 1860, and in 1867 the convent was forcibly closed by the Mexican government. The nuns went to live in private homes, two or three to a home, and attempted to maintain their vows and community while living outside of the physical structure of a convent. The last nun would die in 1907 without the convent ever being reconstituted.

The removal of both tribes from New York to Wisconsin in that decade only exacerbated this trend. By 1837, the Brothertown had decided to accept US citizenship in a pragmatic attempt to hold onto their land, but citizenship would only apply to men over age eighteen. While Stockbridge took a different approach, maintaining their tribal status in the eyes of the federal government, in both cases the types of leadership that had been available to women changed dramatically.

Although indigenous women's practice of Christianity and local authority continued in various ways through the nineteenth and twentieth century, growing nationalism presented new challenges to indigenous autonomy. The specific set of tools that women in Christian Indian communities had deployed in the late colonial and early national period no longer worked in a growing nation-state that did not see Christian identity as a reason to ameliorate anti-indigenous policies. Indigenous women's avenues of influence changed, and certain options for agency disappeared.

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The vignettes above offer glimpses into the lives of a variety of indigenous women living across North America in the same era. Although they existed in very different religious and political contexts, people like Madre Theodora, Mary Doxtator, the Cacica nuns, and the Brothertown and Stockbridge women all belonged to self-governed Christian Indian communities: groups of Native people who organized, established their own spaces, and asserted their rights as indigenous people under the banner of Christianity. These communities, influenced by the pan-Indian networks created at schools like Guadalupe and Moor's, emerged in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century as a response to ever-greater challenges to their land holdings, increasingly racialized prejudice, and the growing normalization of political actors as exclusively white men. The experiences of women within these communities help shed light on broad, enduring,

and cross-disciplinary questions, central to human existence, about the relationships between religious affiliation, ethnicity, and gender.

This dissertation uses a comparative framework to research and analyze the lives of indigenous women who lived in Christian Indian communities in the late colonial and early national period of Mexico and the eastern United States. Within these parameters, my analysis incorporates several different sites. I begin with two boarding schools for native girls, Guadalupe in central Mexico and Moor's in Connecticut, which I argue served as precursors to the Christian Indian spaces created by indigenous people. I then analyze the development of four convents designated exclusively for indigenous women in Mexico, as well as two mixed-gender Christian Indian communities, Brothertown and Stockbridge, established in upstate New York. I study the ways that gendered rhetoric was deployed in creating these communities and securing the permission or sponsorship of colonial and religious officials, and then explore the roles of women who joined these movements. The bulk of this dissertation focuses on the decades when these Christian Indian communities were the most active, between 1780 and 1830. Nevertheless, this study commences in the mid-eighteenth century, with the foundation of boarding schools for indigenous girls, and ends in the mid-nineteenth century, when convents were forcibly closed by the Mexican government and indigenous communities living east of the Mississippi faced the full brunt of United States' removal policies.

Charting women's experiences during the rise and fall of these independent Christian Indian communities led me to identify broad similarities in indigenous women's responses to colonial and imperial rule across both Mexico and the United States. Despite the myriad of ways that Spanish colonialism differed from British

colonialism, and the United States differed from Mexico, indigenous women in both locations often used similar rhetorical positioning and economic tools to carve out more spaces of autonomy for themselves. Therefore, I argue that gender and ethnicity, more than geopolitical context, shaped indigenous women's strategies for survival. Moreover, I demonstrate that women made essential contributions to the establishment, longevity, and financial well-being of Christian Indian communities. By identifying as both fully indigenous and fully Christian, women were able to draw upon multiple avenues of authority to advocate for themselves and their families.

Of course, indigenous women exerted agency in many ways both before and after the arrival of European powers to the New World. This dissertation does not enter into the debate over whether Christianity itself increased or decreased indigenous women's authority, influence, or power – a question which has been vigorously contested by historians for decades. Nor does it take up consideration of Native women who engaged deeply with Christianity at mission sites or as individual converts, such as “Mohawk Saint” Kateri Tekakwitha in early Canada, influential convert Marie Rouensa in Illinois, or Mixtec *cacica* Pascuala Feliciano de Rojas in Oaxaca.<sup>1</sup> In fact, this dissertation does not deal directly with conversion itself: all of the women studied in this dissertation were born to indigenous parents who already identified as Christian. Instead, I take a new approach to the study of gender, ethnicity, and religious identity by focusing exclusively on women who joined Christian Indian communities. By becoming members of these

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), chapter 2; Ronald Spores, “Mixteca Cacicas: Status, Wealth, and the Political Accommodation of Native Elite Women in Early Colonial Oaxaca,” in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 185–98.

communities, these women made both indigeneity and Christianity essential components of their identities, even though other options were available, such as elevating one over the other or abandoning one component altogether. What factors led them to this decision? What were they able to achieve through this dual identity? What limitations did they encounter? Carefully considering the lives of women within these communities helps answer these questions, and also sheds new light on the ways that indigenous people interacted with Euro-American political and religious systems.

Throughout this dissertation, I use terms like indigenous, Native, and Indian to describe the indigenous peoples of the Americas, while prioritizing more specific terms, like tribal identity or ethnicity (Delaware, Narragansett, Zapotec, Mixtec), when available. “Identity” for any one person is always a multi-faceted term, and indigeneity also encompasses a wide range of conceptualizations about family, community, and belonging. In no way can this category be reduced to one single factor, whether biological, cultural, or linguistic, and my use of indigenous, Native, or Indian is certainly not intended to imply that these categorizations are simple or natural. On the other hand, the women I study lived within colonial and national governments that were interested in simplifying identities into strict racial categories, and both the government records and the women themselves often used the single descriptor of “Indian” to define themselves. In fact, as later chapters will demonstrate, indigenous women’s participation in colonial institutions sometimes helped form a pan-Indian identity that emphasized the common experiences of indigenous peoples vis-à-vis colonizing European powers. Even still, these identities remained multi-faceted, rather than monolithic.

## Historiography

My work contributes to an emerging scholarly conversation regarding the role of indigenous people as agents of religious transformation in the Americas, part of a larger recent trend of examining the ways that Native, African, and other non-European peoples understood, navigated, and identified with Christianity. These more recent studies depart from an older model of religious colonization, where scholars like Roberto Ricard in *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico* (published in French in 1933, Spanish in 1957, and English in 1966) or James Axtell in *The Invasion Within* (1985) portrayed Christianization as a one-directional process in which European victors forced religious change onto indigenous victims.<sup>2</sup> While colonization should never be understood separately from violence and coercion, these types of analyses tended to underestimate the agency and initiative of indigenous groups.

Within colonial Mexican history, scholars like Margarita Menegus Bornemann, Rodolfo Aguirre Salvador, and Ileana Schmidt Diaz de Leon (all publishing in Spanish out of Mexico), as well as Matthew O'Hara (publishing primarily in English in the United States) have argued that indigenous men defended their rights and asserted their identity even through participation in colonial institutions such as the Catholic church. In 2006, Menegus and Aguirre, both researchers at the Universidad Autónoma de México, published their findings regarding indigenous men who had either been awarded a university degree or became an ordained priest in the colonial period. While they found that indigenous men's access to these privileges varied based on the political climate

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Oakland: University of California Press, 1966); James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, overall more indigenous men achieved these positions than had previously been understood.<sup>3</sup> Matthew O'Hara extended Menegus and Aguirre's analysis into the quotidian experiences of indigenous parishioners across Mexico in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Specifically, he focused on how indigenous groups resisted the Spanish monarchy's effort to secularize and homogenize parishes, promoting the use of the Spanish language and de-emphasizing indigenous rights. As he concluded, "colonial institutions served as contact points where colonial subjects articulated and interpreted colonial identities, sometimes indexing multiple categories of belonging that on the surface seemed at odds."<sup>4</sup> Ileana Schmidt Díaz de León arrived at a similar conclusion in a smaller and more focused study of the Colegio de San Gregorio, a school for indigenous boys in Mexico City, arguing that the school "facilitated the development and expression of an 'Indian' identity among indigenous people in the city."<sup>5</sup> These works, which focus particularly on the institution of the Catholic Church, join with a larger historiographical turn toward examining the ways that indigenous people navigated the institutions of colonialism. Scholars like Yanna Yannakakis, Bianca Premo, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Adrian Masters, Karen Caplan, and Peter Villela, among others, have produced provocative and compelling studies of the ways that indigenous people participated in and sometimes helped shape Spanish law, canon law, royal patronage, and racial or ethnic categories.

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<sup>3</sup> Margarita Menegus Bornemann and Rodolfo Aguirre Salvador, *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVIII* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew D. O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in Mexico, 1749–1857* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 231.

<sup>5</sup> Ileana Schmidt Díaz de León, *Colegio Seminario De Indios De San Gregorio Y El Desarrollo De La Indianidad En El Centro de Mexico 1586 - 1856* (Guanajuato, Mexico: University of Guanajuato, 2012), 26.

Several scholars of Mexican history have also focused specifically on the experiences of indigenous women in Catholic institutions. In 1963, historian Josefina Muriel published a ground-breaking history of the first convent for indigenous women in Mexico, Corpus Christi. While her brief study reflected a certain reliance on missionary and Spanish perspectives – for example, she commented that “Indian women happily learned the new style of life” taught by Spanish friars – her investigation paved the way for future historians.<sup>6</sup> These included women like Sister Ann Miriam Gallagher, R. S. M., who carefully analyzed the family origins of the Corpus Christi nuns, and brought to light for the first time the racial conflict that occurred between the founding Spanish or Creole nuns and the new indigenous nuns.<sup>7</sup> Asunción Lavrin included a chapter on indigenous nuns in her 2008 book on convents in Mexico, broadening the scope of analysis to include the experiences of women at the second indigenous convent, located in Valladolid, as well as the Cacicas’ convent in Oaxaca.<sup>8</sup> Mónica Díaz, in a monograph titled *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*, examined letters and biographies written by indigenous nuns, focusing on their positionality, rhetoric, and the “discursive construction of the colonial subject.”<sup>9</sup> All of these studies have enriched our understanding of the lives of indigenous women who became nuns in late colonial Mexico.

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<sup>6</sup> Josefina Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1963), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Ann Miriam Gallagher, R.S.M., “The Indian Nuns of Mexico City’s Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821,” in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Mónica Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy in Colonial Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 17.

My research is indebted to these historians who pioneered the development of women's history within colonial Mexican studies, but also advances scholarship by extending the chronological framework of analysis, incorporating newly-available sources, and placing the Mexico story in a comparative context. The abovementioned studies focus on convents for indigenous women during the colonial period, but all of the convents remained open until they were forcibly closed by the Mexican government as part of the Reform measures of the 1860s. My study will be the first to extend into the nineteenth century and consider both the rise and fall of convents for indigenous women. My ability to tell this story emerges in part from the ever-shifting landscape of Mexican archives. For example, many nineteenth-century documents relating to the Cacicas' Convent, had been in the personal collection of Luis Castañeda Guzmán, a historian and antiquarian from Oaxaca. After his death in 2003, these documents were acquired by the Biblioteca Juan de Córdova, which opened to the public in 2012. Similarly, the Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de Antequera, Oaxaca, the ecclesiastical archive for the archdiocese of Oaxaca, is only open intermittently to researchers, and their nineteenth-century holdings are uncatalogued. Documents relating to the Cacicas' Convent from both the Biblioteca Juan de Córdova and the Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de Antequera have allowed me to tell the complete history of the Cacicas' Convent from its foundation to its closure, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the ways that colonial and national rule impacted the development of the convent.

A heavily Eurocentric viewpoint dominated histories of British North America and the United States through the middle of the twentieth century. On the rare occasions that the experiences of indigenous people were taken into consideration, they were

typically portrayed as either savages or victims, with little agency or ability to influence national history. In the 1960s and 70s, however, the emergence of minority studies and the activism of indigenous peoples claiming greater recognition – perhaps best exemplified by the writings of Lakota activist Vine Deloria Jr – pushed scholars to examine Native perspectives more seriously.<sup>10</sup> Historians like James Merrell and William Simmons in the 1980s argued against the popular understanding that Native peoples were best understood as victims who had disappeared from the modern landscape. Instead, they uncovered ways that indigenous people had sometimes resisted and sometimes worked within colonial systems to preserve their own survival. Richard White’s seminal work *Middle Ground* (1991) placed native actors at the center of geopolitical negotiations over North America, providing future historians with a new orientation on American history, particularly that of the Ohio river region.<sup>11</sup> Later works, such as Daniel Richter’s *Facing East from Indian Country* (2001), Kathleen DuVal’s *Native Ground* (2007), and Pekka Hämmäläinen’s *Comanche Empire* (2008), took similar approaches in highlighting native agency.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars of history and religion have taken up the challenge to better understand indigenous perspectives on Christianity within North America. A 1981 article by James P. Ronda titled “Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha’s Vineyard” and a 2007 monograph by David J. Silverman both argued that the Wampanoags of Martha’s Vineyard found Christianity useful for ameliorating the effects of colonization and

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<sup>10</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001); Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Pekka Hämmäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

helping avoid violence.<sup>13</sup> Also around the turn of the millennia, the Brothertown Nation began a campaign to regain federal recognition as a tribe. While their petition was rejected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2012, the attention garnered by the campaign helped lead to the production of three books focused on the history of the Brothertown: Brad D. E. Jarvis's *The Brothertown Nation of Indians* (2010), which examined shifting perspectives of land ownership in Brothertown; Silverman's *Red Brethren* (2010), which analyzed the ways that pan-Indian solidarity emerged in both Brothertown and Stockbridge, and Craig Cipolla's *Becoming Brothertown* (2013), produced in collaboration with the Brothertown Nation, which took an archeological approach to the study of Brothertown ethnogenesis. Around the same time, historian Joel Martin edited a volume of essays titled *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (2010), which took as one of its foundational principles the importance of treating Native Christians with "the kind of recognition for complexity extended to other converts to Christianity in other times and places."<sup>14</sup> In this spirit, Edward Andrews and Linford Fisher conducted research across New England, arguing that the spread of Christianity among indigenous groups was due partly to the efforts of indigenous people (and in Andrew's study, African and Afro-descendant people as well) who identified with and practiced Christianity, even to the point that they attempted to convert their brethren to the same belief system or became ministers.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James P. Ronda, "Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha's Vineyard," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 38, no. 3 (July 1, 1981): 369–94, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1921953>; David J. Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas, *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013); Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); See also Hilary E. Wyss, "Mary Occom and Sarah Simon: Gender and

This dissertation seeks to advance that research by studying the ways that gender intersected with both ethnic identity and religious practice. The studies mentioned above, while providing rich detail about the lives of indigenous peoples in British North America and the United States, focus mainly on male actors, both indigenous and Euro-American. The few studies of women's roles, by scholars like Hilary Wyss and E. Jennifer Monaghan, have been limited to short articles.<sup>16</sup> Using gender as a primary lens of analysis, I uncover how women shaped the adaptation of Christianity within native communities. As the evidence shows, women voiced their own opinions about the ethnic, racial, and religious definitions of Christian Indian projects, and made crucial contributions to the financial stability of Christian Indian communities. Moreover, Native women's advocacy for fellow indigenous people helped uncover new possibilities for what Anishinaabe theorist Gerald Vizenor, in a 2008 publication, calls survivance, the active re-fashioning and endurance of Native presence.<sup>17</sup>

This dissertation, therefore, intervenes in the existing historiography in different ways for each regional focus. In Mexico, I connect together the stories of various religious institutions for indigenous girls and women for the first time, encompassing the complete arc of development from the emergence of these institutions in the early eighteenth century to their closure in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, I draw upon

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Native Literacy in Colonial New England," *The New England Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 387–412; Laura J Murray, "What Did Christianity Do for Joseph Johnson? A Mohegan Preacher and His Community," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 160–80; Joanna Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Literature and Leadership in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, "'She Loved to Read in Good Books': Literacy and the Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1643–1725," *History of Education Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1990): 493–521, <https://doi.org/10.2307/368944>; Wyss, "Mary Occom and Sarah Simon."

<sup>17</sup> Gerald Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice," in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, by Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1–25.

a broader range of sources than previous scholars could access, allowing me to tell the story of indigenous nuns with more detail. For British North America and the United States, I shed new light on the roles of women within Christian Indian communities, and the formation of indigenous Christian identity more generally. European and Native gender norms impacted the way that indigenous people interacted with colonial and national officials, and women developed particular strategies for these interactions that differed from men's strategies.

Most importantly, however, this dissertation breaks away from traditional reliance on colonial or national boundaries to define historical categories of research, a tradition which has been equally prominent in both Mexican and United States' history. Such a focus provides a detailed look at the impact of British Protestantism or Spanish Catholicism on indigenous groups, but carries the risk of over-emphasizing the role of European geopolitical differences, particularly in terms of religion. As Stephanie Kirk and Sarah Rivett lamented in a 2010 article, "Disciplines and fields still perpetuate a notion of the hegemonic imposition of Christianity along linguistic and national boundaries." This division, they argued, "is neither accurate nor productive as a model for advancing the field of religion in early American studies."<sup>18</sup> After all, as Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra pointed out in his book, *Puritan Conquistadors*, "Some justifications for colonization in Puritan colonial Massachusetts were really not that different from those espoused in, say, Catholic colonial Lima."<sup>19</sup> Most importantly, indigenous people across the Americas faced dramatic shifts in population, ruptures in cultural norms, and

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<sup>18</sup> Stephanie Kirk and Sarah Rivett, "Religious Transformations in the Early Modern Americas," *Early American Literature* 45, no. 1 (2010): 61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eal.0.0096>.

<sup>19</sup> Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 9.

the imposition of new systems of religion. Analyzing the emergence and operations of Christian Indian communities in multiple regions allows me to draw larger conclusions about the methods and strategies that indigenous people, particularly women, used when engaging with colonial systems.

One recent example of how this comparative strategy has been applied is Steven W. Hackel and Hilary E. Wyss' chapter on literacy among Native Americans in missionary contexts in both Baja California and New England, published in the book *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (2010). Despite theological disparities on the importance of literacy in early modern Protestantism versus Catholicism, Hackel and Wyss found that on the question of Native literacy, "surprising similarities emerge where conventional wisdom had suggested there were only differences."<sup>20</sup> This comparison allowed them to see how indigenous people in both contexts used the written word in ways that frustrated their missionary teachers, particularly to strengthen ethnic alliances and resistance to colonialism, and demonstrates how comparative work can illuminate broader themes about the relationship between Europeans, Indians, sovereignty, gender, and religion.

Of course, comparative analysis rests partly on the differences between various regions; differences which were, in the case of British Protestant North America and Spanish Catholic Mesoamerica, quite marked. Central Mexico, as well as the Oaxaca region, was inhabited primarily by sedentary indigenous groups, such as the Nahuas, Zapotecs, and Mixtecs, in the centuries before the Spanish arrived. The region now

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<sup>20</sup> Steven W. Hackel, and Hilary E. Wyss, "Print Culture and the Power of Native Literacy in California and New England Missions," in *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape*, ed. Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 201.

known as New England, in contrast, was home to Eastern Woodlands groups that lived primarily nomadic lifestyles in pursuit of seasonal hunting and gathering opportunities. While both populations were hit hard by disease through exposure to European groups, in Mexico the levels of indigenous population remained relatively high in comparison to the number of Spanish colonizers, whereas waves of English and other European migrants, coupled with high fertility rates, soon outnumbered indigenous peoples along the Eastern seaboard. Finally, Spanish colonization arrived in the Americas backed by a Catholic theology that made the concept of rapid, widespread conversion of natives both desirable and at least superficially attainable – particularly when enforced by violence. In British North America, missionary endeavors as a whole progressed more haltingly, as the Crown prioritized land acquisition over indigenous conversion, and missionary beliefs that “civilization” had to come before “conversion” both slowed down the rate of conversion and made the process more painful and disruptive to indigenous groups.

Despite these differences, native women, especially by the late eighteenth century, often confronted surprisingly similar challenges under colonial rule, and developed similar type of strategies to try to ameliorate the impact of colonialism and expand their own avenues of agency. These similarities are most pronounced when considering change over time: in both the United States and Mexico, identifying as a Christian Indian gave indigenous women greater access to certain opportunities in the late colonial and very early national periods, but these opportunities greatly diminished as the power of the nation-state grew in the nineteenth century. Similarly, in both regions, indigenous women drew upon certain aspects of European gender norms to create petitions and letters that would be particularly compelling to governmental and religious

authorities, and then used these rhetorical devices to advocate for indigenous people. By identifying these commonalities across diverse regions, I suggest a larger and cohesive framework for understanding European and indigenous interactions in the Americas, while also noting the ways in which the specific contours of women's lived experiences varied by location.

This dissertation is divided into three sections. Each section incorporates a comparative introduction and conclusion, which bookend two chapters that focus on different regions. The first section addresses schools for indigenous girls, which I argue served as precursors to the development of Christian Indian communities more broadly. For the chapter on Mexico, I analyze the foundation of the Guadalupe School for indigenous girls in Mexico City in 1754, the first boarding school established exclusively for indigenous girls. Within a decade of its foundation, indigenous women would occupy the posts of headmistress as well as all the teaching positions, which gave them a certain level of authority and influence within colonial Spanish society. For example, they were able to solicit government postings for friends and relatives, provide crucial testimony for benefactors who sought royal patronage, and write directly to the viceroy. For North America, I focus on the Female School at Moor's Indian Charity School founded by Congregationalist minister Eleazar Wheelock in 1761. Indigenous girls who attended this school did not attain the same type of leadership positions as the Guadalupe students, but they nevertheless exerted influence over Wheelock and helped shape conditions at the school. In particular, they developed uniquely gendered strategies for navigating Wheelock's patriarchal authority, while also asserting their own autonomy. Overall, this

section demonstrates ways in which indigenous women engaged with Christianity and European educational models to advance female indigenous agency.

The second section of this dissertation focuses on the establishment of two crucial Christian Indian communities: the Cacicas' Convent in Oaxaca, Mexico, and the Brothertown tribe in upstate New York. In both locations, indigenous groups interacted with local governments to petition for the establishment of Christian Indian spaces, creating some of the clearest documented statements of indigenous perspectives on these communities. My analysis reveals the ways in which both indigenous groups and their colonial interlocutors deployed gendered rhetoric in supporting or opposing Christian Indian communities. In Oaxaca, priests and bishops described indigenous women as tender flowers in need of protection from indigenous spiritual practices, while indigenous petitioners focused on the honor that would accrue to indigenous women accepted into the convent, as well as their families. In New York, the indigenous founders of Brothertown focused on masculinity, arguing that their current position as subjugated members of New England society prevented them from achieving true manhood. While scholars have analyzed the beginnings of these two Christian Indian projects, none have focused particularly on gender. Comparing these different strategies used by Native groups in both regions helps clarify the differences between Spanish and Anglo perspectives on gender. More importantly, it also demonstrates that indigenous people in both regions used colonial understandings of gender as a way of strengthening their own agenda against the powers of empire.

The third and final section of this dissertation focuses on the lives of women within Christian Indian communities after their establishment. In these chapters, I reveal

the ways in which indigenous women used membership in Christian Indian communities to increase their influence and status, assert their own beliefs about race and ethnicity, and advocate for fellow indigenous people. Indigenous nuns in Mexico influenced the decisions of viceroys, obtained special blessings from the Pope, and ensured the financial stability of their convent. Nevertheless, when they tried to make entrance into a convent accessible to a broader range of indigenous women, church and government officials rebuked them and imposed their own standards. In the United States, indigenous women were primarily responsible for the economic well-being of Christian Indian communities by producing cloth that helped reduce tribal dependence on exploitative traders. Native women also became schoolteachers, recognized both by their tribal communities and by missionary societies or government authorities. However, as in Mexico, when women tried to expand the definition of Christian Indian communities by marrying outside of the tribe, their claims to membership on behalf of their husband and children were rejected. This section demonstrates both the possibilities and the limits of women's influence and agency based on their dual identity as Christian and indigenous.

Overall, my dissertation reveals the varieties and yet broad similarities of indigenous women's creative approaches to survivance. In joining Christian Indian movements, native women across the Americas asserted new understandings of the relationship between ethnicity, religion, and gender. Positioning themselves at the intersection of indigenous and Christian identity allowed them to draw upon multiple avenues of authority to navigate colonial and national systems, with the goals of increasing their own influence and authority, asserting their rights, and advocating for indigenous people.

### Background: European missionary perspectives on Native women

*“Since that day she greatly strengthened and augmented her fervors...and practiced the most solid virtues in her divine observance. Her silence was great, her penances rigorous, her fast perpetual, her prayer fervent, her preference for God continuous, her independence absolute.”<sup>21</sup>*

*“She was a Person of a very blameless Life...the good Works she did praised her: She was particularly a very remarkable Example of Kindness and Charity to her Neighbors...She was much given to Hospitality. She was a very courteous, discreet, and diligent Woman.”<sup>22</sup>*

In order to fully understand the context of Native women’s experiences in Christian Indian communities, it is helpful to begin with an analysis of the perspectives on indigenous women espoused by European missionaries, priests, and pastors in both New England and Mexico. These perspectives often both built upon and helped constitute, in a mutually reinforcing process, a set of gender norms and stereotypes through which European peoples interpreted indigenous women’s words and actions. Moreover, these gender norms then created a set of parameters that defined whether Euro-American religious leaders would support or oppose certain actions by indigenous women, and served as the background for indigenous women’s negotiations with colonial officials. The corpus of missionary writings about indigenous women, particularly those who converted to Christianity or lived at mission sites, reveals several broad themes among both British Protestant and Spanish Catholic conceptions of Native women. Examining missionary definitions of “good Christian Indian women” will lay the groundwork for future chapters, in which I explore how Native women inhabited, extended, or pushed these definitions for their own purposes. As the quotes above

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<sup>21</sup> Juan de Urtassum, *La gracia triunfante en la vida de Catharina Tegakovita, india iroquesa, y en las de otras, assi de su nacion, como de esta Nueva-España* (Mexico City: Published by Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1724), 230.

<sup>22</sup> Experience Mayhew, *Indian Converts* (1727) reprinted in Laura Arnold Leibman, ed., *Experience Mayhew’s Indian Converts: A Cultural Edition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 228.

demonstrate – one from a Spanish Creole priest in 1724, the other from an Anglo-American minister in 1727 – even as missionaries piled adjective upon adjective of praise for Christian Indian women, they also circumscribed their roles and belied the influence of popular prejudices.

European gender norms, of course, varied somewhat between Spanish Catholicism and British Protestantism, although both drew on a common Christian theology. Throughout the majority of the colonial period (the fifteenth through early eighteenth centuries), the Spanish crown was closely aligned with the papacy, using their military might to enforce the spread of Catholicism and earning special favors from the pope in return – such as the *patronato real*, which gave permission to the Spanish monarchy to appoint bishops in their territories, a privilege otherwise reserved to the pope. Spanish Catholicism, therefore, was strongly hierarchical as well as patriarchal. Women deemed exceptional, such as Teresa of Avila and Rose of Lima, charted out new models of feminine spirituality, based on mystical experiences and rapturous moments of union with Christ – but these models of spirituality remained within general beliefs about women being more emotional, passionate, and connected to spiritual realities as compared to men. On the other hand, even these mystical revelations carried the potential for danger: women who strayed too far from Catholic orthodoxy were labeled heretics or witches instead of celebrated as saints.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Silvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985); Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana, Or, The Traps of Faith* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988); José Luis Sanchez Lora, *Mujeres, Conventos, y Formas de La Religiosidad Barroca* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1988); Fernando Iwasaki Cauti, “Mujeres al Borde de La Perfección: Rosa de Santa María y Las Alumbradas de Lima,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 73, no. 4 (1993): 581–613, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2516836>; Martha C. Howell, *The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1550* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Kathleen Ann Myers, *Neither Saints Nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America* (New

As Protestant theology separated itself from Catholicism in the sixteenth century, a slightly different set of gender norms emerged for women living in the British Isles, and eventually New England. Since Protestants, by and large, eliminated monastic orders from their religious practice, women typically only had one path available to them: marriage. While many of the disestablishment forms of Protestantism that would heavily influence New England religious identity – like Puritanism, congregationalism, and Anabaptist movements – placed less emphasis on hierarchy than Catholicism, they remained staunchly paternalistic. Women were expected to spend the majorities of their lives under the authority of either their fathers or husbands, and submission to male leadership was one of the primary markers of a virtuous woman. Protestant theology did also emphasize the role of an individual's conscience and the importance of self-reflection in discerning spiritual truths, a belief that women like Anne Hutchinson and Anne Bradstreet used to assert their own theological insights; but as in Spanish Catholic cultures, these types of assertions carried with them the risk of being accused of heresy or witchcraft.<sup>24</sup>

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York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Charlene Villaseñor Black, "St. Anne Imagery and Maternal Archetypes in Spain and Mexico," in *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the Americas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3–31; Lisa Vollendorf, *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005); Mónica Díaz and Quispe-Agnoli, Rocío, "Uncovering Women's Colonial Archive," in *Women's Negotiations and Textual Agency in Latin America, 1500-1799* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 1–16.

<sup>24</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Essays on Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Boston: Trustees of the Public Library, 1944); Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 1956); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Philip J. Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789*, (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

These gender norms informed the early explorers, colonizers, and missionaries of Americas and influenced their perception of indigenous women. To begin with, Spanish explorers often used indigenous women's conformity with Spanish Catholic gender norms as a measuring stick for the cultures they encountered. For example, Christopher Columbus took careful notes of indigenous women's clothing at every place in the Caribbean where the Spanish landed; the more the women's typical dress and behavior seemed like those of European women, the more "advanced" he deemed their culture.<sup>25</sup> Writing a few decades later, Franciscan friar and chronicler Toribio de Benavente, better known as Motolinía, argued strongly that indigenous women could easily adapt Spanish gender norms. In his *History of the Indians of New Spain*, written during the 1530s, he praised the dedication of Nahua women who lived at indigenous temples, who took and maintained a vow of chastity and service to the temple gods. In fact, given that they remained in an enclosed community, held regular meetings where individuals' faults were disciplined, and followed a regular schedule of prayers, Motolinía claimed that "some Spaniards called them nuns."<sup>26</sup> Motolinía, who was strongly in favor of better treatment of indigenous people, used these comparisons between indigenous and Spanish women as a way of defending indigenous people. For the early Spanish arrivals to the New World, gender norms and the behaviors of indigenous women were a useful tool for distinguishing how compatible a culture was with Spanish Catholicism – or, as the Spanish might have put it, how civilized it was.

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<sup>25</sup> Christopher Columbus, *The Diario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492–1493*, trans. Oliver Dunn and James E. Kelley Jr (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 89; see pages 65 and 95 for similar examples.

<sup>26</sup> Toribio de Benavente Motolinía, *Historia de Los Indios de la Nueva Espana* (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2007), 60. The translation of this and all subsequent quotes from Spanish-language documents are my own.

Secondly, early Spanish explorers saw women as translators and go-betweens, a viewpoint that would quickly become part of the typical Spanish *modus operandi*.<sup>27</sup> Columbus' diary also reveals that he believed that indigenous women would have a calming influence on indigenous men and help avoid violence. He specifically took women captive along with indigenous men "so that the men would behave better in Spain, having women from their country, than without them."<sup>28</sup> From Columbus' perspective, there was no danger that the women would encourage the men to resist the Spanish; instead, he assumed that the indigenous men would seek to protect the women by carefully following all orders. Columbus also assumed that women would pick up the Spanish language more easily than the men would, and in one case captured a "young and pretty woman" one night only to return her to her people the next day, "trusting in the report the Indian woman would have given that the Christians were good people."<sup>29</sup> One woman's success in the role as intermediary drew positive attention from a number of commentators: Malintzin, Hernando Cortez's translator and eventual consort. For example, Bernal Díaz de Castillo, who accompanied Cortez on his 1530 march into central Mexico, wrote very little about indigenous women in general, but took the time to praise Malintzin for her skills in communication. Moreover, since Malintzin had been originally given or traded as a slave, away from her family of origin, de Castillo compared her to Joseph from the Bible. Like Joseph, he explained, Malintzin had been betrayed by her family and forced

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<sup>27</sup> See Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Scott Cave, "Madalena: The Entangled History of One Indigenous Floridian Woman in the Atlantic World," *The Americas* 74, no. 2 (April 2017): 171–200, <https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2017.11>, for in-depth analysis of women's roles as go-betweens and translators.

<sup>28</sup> Columbus, *Diario*, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Columbus, *Diario*, 147, 225.

into a life of servitude, but the skills she acquired in exile eventually allowed her to save her family.<sup>30</sup> By identifying parallels between Malinztin and a hero of the Old Testament, del Castillo offered a positive perspective on the actions of indigenous women.

Indigenous women's role as translators and intermediaries generally gained them a positive reputation with the Spanish.

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spanish missionaries continued to speak positively of indigenous women who converted to Christianity, although their descriptions also relied on certain racial stereotypes and were sometimes tempered, as in José de Acosta's *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* (1589), by lengthy descriptions of "idolatrous" indigenous practices. Writing a few decades after Cortez' march, Motolinía was able to include the stories of indigenous women who had converted to Christianity, using them as an example of the effectiveness of initial evangelization efforts. For example, he chronicled the episode of an indigenous woman, a practicing Christian, who defended herself from demonic attacks by invoking the name of Jesus.<sup>31</sup> Although a recent convert, the indigenous woman apparently already knew how to draw on supernatural power to counteract agents of evil. Franciscan Friar Gerónimo de Mendieta also included a handful of chapters about indigenous women in his two-volume history of the Catholic Church in Latin America, a 1595 publication titled *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana*, although his stories focused more on demonstrations of personal piety. For example, he recounted the tale of one indigenous woman who had accidentally knocked a crucifix onto the floor and came the very next morning to confess the incident,

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<sup>30</sup> Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The True History of The Conquest of New Spain*, trans. Janet Burke and Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2012), 55.

<sup>31</sup> Motolinía, *Historia de Los Indios de la Nueva Espana*, 109.

deeply repentant of any disrespect towards the crucified Christ that her clumsiness may have implied.<sup>32</sup> Writing in the late seventeenth century, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora was able to include the story of two indigenous women within his broader history of the Convento Real de Jesus Maria, published in 1684 on the hundredth anniversary of the convent's opening. While the royal and ecclesiastical policy prevented these women from becoming nuns, they both lived as servants at the convent, and Sigüenza y Góngora argued that their Christian example was worthy of imitation due to the "admirable perfection" they had achieved through their patience, devotion, simplicity and dedication to prayer.<sup>33</sup>

The writings of Mendieta, Sigüenza y Góngora, and Spanish chronicler José de Acosta also reveal their racialized viewpoints of indigenous women, and the limits of an indigenous woman's good reputation with Spanish missionaries. Notably, almost all of the women profiled as exemplary were either very old, practicing religious devotion as widows, or very young, typically accepting an early death with grace. Very few women in their childbearing years were identified as particularly holy, perhaps due to underlying concerns about their sexuality. Secondly, the woman needed some external authority figure to verify their sanctity. All of their stories were, of course, recorded by male priests; but Mendieta also explicitly mentioned that stories of miraculous interventions could "fill an entire volume" but that not all of the stories were commonly believed, only those that had been properly investigated and reported.<sup>34</sup> The story of Francisca, an

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<sup>32</sup> Geronimo de Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiastica Indiana*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Edicion Atlas, 1973), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Parayso Occidental: Plantado y Cultivado Por La Liberal Benefica Mano de Los Muy Catholicos y Poderosos Reyes de España, Nuestros Señores En Su Magnifico Real Convento de Jesus Maria En Mexico, 1684*, (Mexico City: CONDUMEX, 1995), 175r.

<sup>34</sup> Mendieta, *Historia Eclesiastica Indiana*, 2:66.

indigenous servant living in the Convento Real de Jesús María, exemplifies this practice of verification. She miraculously received a small statue of Christ crucified, to which she had a particular devotion, but all of the nuns in the convent, along with several priests, had to examine it in order to confirm its divine origin.<sup>35</sup> Finally, other brief mentions of racial stereotypes pepper all the texts. For example, Sigüenza y Góngora noted that Francisca, “being an Indian...can be inferred to be completely poor.”<sup>36</sup> When describing schools for indigenous girls, Mendieta added as an aside that of course any education of indigenous girls would prepare them to be wives, since they were not created to be nuns (“no eran para ser monjas”).<sup>37</sup> Even indigenous women’s ability to practice Christianity was attributed to their supposedly innate virtues of “natural simplicity.”<sup>38</sup> The descriptions of indigenous women, even those who converted to Christianity, remained within certain parameters determined by racialized assumptions.

Other more explicit concerns also appear in the texts, particularly in relation to alcohol and promiscuity. While praising the ability of missionary friars to impose sobriety on indigenous villages, Motolinía also admitted that drunkenness was common among “all of the Native adult men and women.”<sup>39</sup> Although Motolinía generally focused on indigenous people’s acceptance of Christianity, the specters of intemperance and profligacy did cast a slight shadow on his writings. In his history of Iberoamerica, José de Acosta questioned whether indigenous women could truly practice chastity. Interestingly, he discussed the same group of virgins serving at the ancient temples as Motolinía had

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<sup>35</sup> Sigüenza y Góngora, *Parayso Occidental*, 74r–75r.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 174r.

<sup>37</sup> Mendieta, *Historia Ecclesiastica Indiana*, 1:190.

<sup>38</sup> Sigüenza y Góngora, *Parayso Occidental*, 173r.

<sup>39</sup> Motolinía, *Historia de Los Indios de la Nueva Espana*, 107.

done over fifty years earlier, but with more negative connotations. “In Mexico,” Acosta explained, “the devil had his form of nuns as well...virgins appointed for the cult of the god.” Moreover, Acosta emphasized the fact that the women only lived at the temple for a few years before leaving to be married, although Motolinía had said that some remained there for decades. In contrast, Acosta implied that indigenous women only preserved their chastity through demonic control, and that even this behavior was merely a temporary digression from their typical approach to sexuality.<sup>40</sup>

For their part, English explorers also recorded observations about the indigenous people they met, although the Atlantic world had already become a much more interconnected place by the time the English established a colony in Virginia in 1607. Texts like John Smith’s *Generall History of Virginia and New-England*, for example, were for this reason not tinged with the same level of awe at first encounters as Columbus’ diary, but nevertheless included ethnographic-style reporting on various indigenous groups. Like Columbus, Smith used European gender norms to critique indigenous societies, but Smith focused mainly on the what he perceived as shortcomings in indigenous masculinity. He noted several times that indigenous men and women dressed quite similarly, and acknowledged that indigenous women sometimes held positions of authority within a tribe.<sup>41</sup> However, he felt that the fluidity of indigenous gender roles was caused by the failure of indigenous men to practice European-style masculinity. For example, he claimed that in one violent New England conflict, the

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<sup>40</sup> José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, ed. Jane E. Mangan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 284–85.

<sup>41</sup> John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, Documenting the American South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 17–18, 4, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/smith/smith.html>. Given that I translated all quotations from Spanish into modern English, I have also updated quotations in older styles of English to reflection modern conventions, so as to not create an unnecessary distinction between the two languages.

Algonquian men noticed that the English did not shoot at indigenous women, and so the younger men began to cry out “we are women” in attempt to leverage European gender norms in their own defense. In Smith’s opinion, this strategy was contrary to English standards of masculinity, which required self-sacrifice in battle.<sup>42</sup> Smith also criticized men for being “idle” while indigenous women were hard-working.<sup>43</sup> This image of men as lazy while the women were industrious would resonate with future English and British missionaries. For example, Roger Williams, missionary to the Narragansetts in Rhode Island, wrote in his 1642 book *A Key Into the Language of America*, that “their women constantly beat all their corn by hand,” but that men were not typically involved in agricultural production.<sup>44</sup>

Smith also included in his writings what would become one of the most common and influential tropes about indigenous women: the idea that they were sexually promiscuous and easily available to English men. He described a feast in which thirty young women danced in a circle around him, “falling into their infernal passions.” When the dance was concluded, these women, which Smith now called “nymphs,” supposedly crowded around him asking him, “Love you not me?”<sup>45</sup> As historian Camilla Townsend has pointed out, this scene of foreign women throwing themselves at Smith appeared numerous times in his diaries, including from his travels in the middle east, and drew upon a long history of similar tropes.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Smith quickly came to broader conclusions about indigenous women’s sexuality: “They are inconstant in everything,” he

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, 235.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Roger Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2010), 37; See also Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), chapter 3, “Idle Indian and Lazy Englishman”.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 53.

claimed.<sup>47</sup> Smith's conclusion, therefore, was that all indigenous women were potential sexual partners for English men, and moreover that the indigenous women would most likely gladly participate in any such sexual endeavors, due to their natural promiscuity. In his more sympathetic portrayal of indigenous people in general, Roger Williams strongly disagreed with Smith's depiction of indigenous women as profligate. He noted that virgin women wore their hair "falling down...over their eyes" to protect their modesty, and stated that even the "pagan wild" natives "confess the bonds of married chastity."<sup>48</sup> Williams' spirited defense of indigenous women's chastity, however, belies how the idea of indigenous women as sexually available had already spread broadly: enough that Williams had to specifically address the point.

Like many of the early Spanish missionaries, English missionaries also offered hope that indigenous women could accept and practice Christianity. The 1643 tract *New England's First Fruits* describing initial missionary efforts in Massachusetts, commonly attributed to John Eliot, included the story of the conversion of an "Indian maid" as one of the examples of success. In fact, the woman's story was told as the second of seven total stories, following only the example of the conversion of a sachem's son. The example of the indigenous woman probably received such a prominent position in the text because of the completeness and clearness of her conversion experience. According to the tract, the woman would often leave church services "crying out with abundance of tears, concluding that she must burn when she die...unless free grace should prevent it; and after this grew very careful of her carriage."<sup>49</sup> As Julian Rubin has argued, this cycle

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<sup>47</sup> Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America*, 29, 30.

<sup>49</sup> *New England's First Fruits* (London: Printed by R.O. and G.D. for Henry Overton, 1643), 7, <https://archive.org/details/NewEnglandsFirstFruitsInRespectFirstOfTheCounversionOfSome>.

of extreme penitence and acceptance of grace characterized Puritan understandings of theology, making the native woman's conversion experience fit closely with Eliot's ideals.<sup>50</sup> Roger Williams identified certain parallels between the Native groups he encountered in Rhode Island and Massachusetts and the Jewish people, especially in how the women went to live in a separate dwelling during certain times in their menstrual cycle.<sup>51</sup> In William's mind, if indigenous people were descended from one of the Lost Tribes of Israel, this meant that they were eligible candidates for conversion to Christianity, and in fact could hasten the ultimate conversion of the world to Christ.

English missionary efforts, however, proceeded haltingly, and missionaries often had few conversion stories to tell – and even fewer stories involving women. For example, John Eliot's 1670 pamphlet "A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New England" focused exclusively on men who had accepted Christianity (sometimes along with their unnamed "families"). Although Eliot was willing and in fact happy to designate certain indigenous men as teachers of Christianity within their tribes, he never placed a woman in a similar role.<sup>52</sup> A 1704 letter from ministers Cotton Mather, Increase Mather, and Nehemiah Walter, reporting on evangelization efforts to the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, similarly focused only on the conversion stories of indigenous men.<sup>53</sup> Cotton Mather's *opus magnum*, a seven-volume history of the church in New England titled *Magnalia*

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<sup>50</sup> Julius H. Rubin, *Tears of Repentance: Christian Indian Identity and Community in Colonial Southern New England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), chapter two.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America*, unnumbered page in preface.

<sup>52</sup> John Eliot, *A Brief Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New-England, in the Year 1670* (London: John Allen, 1671), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A39223.0001.001>.

<sup>53</sup> Cotton Mather, *A Letter, about the Present State of Christianity, among the Christianized Indians of New-England. Written to the Honourable, Sir William Ashhurst, Governour of the Corporation, for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians, in New-England, and Parts Adjacent, in America*. (Boston: Timothy Green, 1705), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N01027.0001.001>.

*Christi Americana*, only mentioned two specific indigenous women. In the first story, he described the experiences of an unnamed indigenous woman, wife to a man named Pannehammit, living on Martha's Vineyard. The couple had suffered the loss of five children to stillbirth in the years prior to missionary arrival on the island. When Pannehammit's wife gave birth to their sixth child, a son, she went out weeping into a field, where she suddenly felt in her heart the desire to consecrate her son to one sole God. The child survived, and when Thomas Mayhew arrived on the island and began preaching, she realized it had been the Christian God who had saved her child. In Mather's recounting of the story, however, he focused less on the woman's mystical experience with God, and more on the fact that she gave birth to a son who later became "an eminent preacher of Christ unto the other Indians."<sup>54</sup> In other words, it was the indigenous woman's ability to produce a male Christian that mattered, more than her own conversion. The other mention of an indigenous woman had much more sinister connotations. Much of Mather's sixth book was taken up in attempting to document and explain an apparent outbreak in witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. Supposedly, at least part of the dramatic increase in demonic activity was due to the invocations of an "Indian woman" named Tituba.<sup>55</sup> As historian Laura Stevens has pointed out, English missionaries had less evidence of wide-spread conversions than their Spanish or French counterparts, leading to a "tendency to overlook the Indians" in missionary reporting and instead focus on the efforts and suffering of missionaries themselves.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1702), Book Six, 63, <http://archive.org/details/magnaliachristia00math>.

<sup>55</sup> Mather, 674.

<sup>56</sup> Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 109.

### **Eighteenth-century missionary perspectives**

Two final texts offer a glimpse at missionary perspectives of Christian indigenous women in the early eighteenth century, shortly before the Christian Indian communities examined in this dissertation would be established. Both were written to celebrate indigenous conversions and demonstrate the acceptance of Christianity by native communities, particularly to naysayers or pessimists who doubted the effectiveness of missionary work. In the early eighteenth century, viceroy Baltasar de Zúñiga y Velasco decided to establish a convent for Indigenous women as one of his final acts as viceroy: partly as a way of fulfilling the monarchy's goal of bringing native peoples into a more European-like relationship with the Church without challenging the position of Spanish women already established in convents, and partly as a way of demonstrating his own generosity. Even with the viceroy's support, however, the convent was hotly debated. Opponents to the plan, including members of the Audiencia of Mexico, questioned indigenous women's suitability to become nuns, arguing that they were slow to learn and reluctant to speak Spanish.<sup>57</sup> Most criticism of the plan centered around indigenous women's supposed lack of "constancy," questioning whether they would be able to fulfill their vows of chastity.<sup>58</sup> In response to these criticisms, Father Juan de Urtassum published a book in 1724 entitled *La gracia triunfante* [Triumphant Grace] which included a biography of Iroquois woman Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), translated from the original French, along with five biographies of indigenous women in Mexico. His purpose in writing the book, Urtassum explained, was to demonstrate that native women

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<sup>57</sup> Gallagher, R. S. M, "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821," 153.

<sup>58</sup> Antonio Gutiérrez, 1724, quoted in Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent*, 51.

in New Spain had achieved the same levels of virtue as Kateri.<sup>59</sup> A similar text was written in the same decade in British America. Missionary Experience Mayhew, a member of the famous missionary Mayhew family, chronicled his family's successes in their generations of work with the Wampanoag Indians on Martha's Vineyard. His book, titled *Indian Converts* and published in 1727, does not seem to have been prompted by a specific event, as was the case with Urtassum's book. Nevertheless, confidence in Anglo-American missionary outreach had been dwindling since the mid-seventeenth century, and Mayhew's book may have been an attempt to shore up British courage and donations.<sup>60</sup>

The two texts offered surprisingly similar approaches to defining and promoting Christian indigenous women's spirituality. Both books highlighted indigenous women's ability to comply with European gender norms, although for Urtassum this meant maintaining virginity while Mayhew emphasized wifely submission to one's husband. Both also recognized that indigenous women could serve as exemplars of virtue in a variety of ways. On the other hand, both emphasized the role of Euro-American male authority figures, such as themselves, to validate, contextualize, and guide indigenous women's understanding of Christianity.

Urtassum declared directly that he was entering the debate over indigenous women's ability to practice chastity, acknowledging the he was especially focusing on "virgin candor" of the five women he profiled.<sup>61</sup> The biography of each woman mentioned that she made a private vow of chastity at a young age, before eventually

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<sup>59</sup> Urtassum, 210.

<sup>60</sup> Ronda, "Generations of Faith," 372.

<sup>61</sup> Urtassum, 209.

revealing the vow publicly and continuing to abide by it for the rest of her life. Juana de Geronymo, for example, “consecrated her virginity to God and conserved it until her death,” along with another woman named Francisca, who would go on to become a servant in a convent.<sup>62</sup> The story of two unnamed indigenous girls, however, provided the strongest testimonies of chastity. One girl had been healed of paralysis as a young child after promising her virginity to God. As she grew older, her parents suggested that she marry despite her vow, for fear of poverty if she remained single. The girl replied that “the Lord would give her the strength and grace to fulfill her vow.” Urtassum here interjected his own opinion, arguing that when Christ called women to chastity, “He did not exclude those of her nation as being incapable if helped by divine grace to achieve victory.”<sup>63</sup> Another biography featured a young girl who kept her promise to remain a virgin throughout her life, even despite being forced to marry.<sup>64</sup> This example of “extreme continence,” as Urtassum himself describes it, served as the final point in his argument. Not only were indigenous women capable of maintaining their chastity as adults (as Juana and Francisca demonstrated), nor even just of making and keeping this vow as a young child (as the first anonymous girl did): they were capable of maintaining their purity even while married. He concluded that he could offer more examples, but he believed that the previous five were sufficient to show “how much the law of continence has flowered among [them].”<sup>65</sup> These examples of chastity among the indigenous women, Urtassum hoped, would remove any concerns about their ability to successfully fulfill their monastic vows.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 221-222.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>65</sup> Urtassum, 246.

While Mayhew's argument was less explicit than Urtassum's, his approach to biography revealed an underlying concern for well-structured families, particularly revolving around the role of the wife and mother. Mayhew made a clear case that the indigenous women respected their husband's authority. Of the twenty-nine women profiled, nineteen explicitly mention the woman's deference to men when it was time for public or familial prayer. For example, in his biography of Dinah Annunnt, Mayhew noted that "she not only excited [her husband] to pray without ceasing to God, but prayed herself also in the family, when he was not present to do it."<sup>66</sup> The idea that the woman led family prayer only in her husband's absence was repeated in the majority of the cases – even when the woman was the more religious of the marriage. For example, although Hannah Sissetom's husband "by his frequent drunkenness...very much unman'd himself" she still only prayed with her children "when her Husband was not at home."<sup>67</sup> In other words, even when the man of the family did not fulfill male gender roles (being "unman'd" by drink for example), the indigenous Christian woman still complied with female gender roles. When no men were present, women typically selected someone to lead the prayer based on their age and respectability, such as Rachel Wompanummoo, who asked her mother to lead prayer on the occasions when her husband was absent, thus maintaining the family hierarchy.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, Mayhew included stories of women who practiced submission to their husbands, even when it brought more suffering to them. For example, after her conversion to Christianity, Hannah Tiler argued with her husband over his tendency to

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<sup>66</sup> Mayhew, 231.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 271-272.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 300.

drink. Her angry remonstrations, however, did not correspond with the ideal of a submissive wife. “This woman quickly saw that her contending so sharply with her husband,” Mayhew wrote, “...was not the way to cure him.” Instead, she decided to focus on patience, “bearing both with his excessive drinking, and other things hard to be endured.” While Mayhew noted that “this method had not presently the desired effect” he believed that Hannah “found peace in it.”<sup>69</sup> This anecdote served to show that God changed Hannah’s heart, rather than changing her husband’s behavior. She was determined to live a life in accordance with evangelical standards of Christian womanhood, although this apparently meant simply accepting the hardships in her current life rather than trying to exert any authority over her husband.

Urtassum and Mayhew also described other ways that the indigenous women embodied Christian virtues. Urtassum chronicled how God had directly revealed himself to certain indigenous women through miracles or divine revelation, demonstrating them to be worthy recipient of these supernatural occurrences. For example, an indigenous woman named Petronila de la Concepción, living in a convent as a servant, once had a mystical experience while praying in front of a crucifix. The image of Christ, according to Urtassum, “reached out its arm...and placed its hand on Petronila’s heart, and made her feel the marvelous effects of this divine favor.”<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Juana de San Geronymo received a message from God telling her that her patron, Don Fernando, would die soon, but that he would be rewarded in heaven. Urtassum reported that Don Fernando did indeed pass away soon after Juana received this message, seemingly confirming the veracity of Juana’s vision. In two other cases, a miraculous healing from disease signaled

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<sup>69</sup> Mayhew, 279.

<sup>70</sup> Urtassum, 227.

that the indigenous woman had been favored by God and was chosen to live her life in service to him.

Mayhew, on the other hand, focused more on sickness as a time when virtue was on particular display. In *Indian Converts*, many of the women die from diseases, and dealing with illness in a manner befitting a Christian woman is a common theme. For example, when Mary Coshomon fell ill, Mayhew recorded her as saying, “I therefore entreat the Lord to help me...that I may have all my pain and sorrow here in this world, and be forever happy in that which is to come.”<sup>71</sup> The pain did not cause Mary to turn away from God, rather, she trusted in providence and accepted her fate, using the illness to bring her closer to God. For Sarah Peag, it was the sickness and death of others that brought her to Christianity, namely, the death of her son. “When God took this dear and precious child from her,” Mayhew explained, “he by this affliction brought her to a more full sight and sense of her sin.”<sup>72</sup> Within Puritan theology, sickness was often sent by God, and provided an opportunity to consider one’s final destiny.<sup>73</sup> Mayhew seemed to fully espouse this belief, commenting that Mary, for example, “was obliged to bear with patience what her heavenly Father was pleased to lay on her.”<sup>74</sup> In Mayhew’s formulation, therefore, sickness was a part of God’s providential plan, and offered the possibility of demonstrating care and compassion, patient suffering, or acceptance by the Christian indigenous women.

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<sup>71</sup> Mayhew, 271.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>73</sup> See Silverman, 66, and James Axtell, *The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) 74.

<sup>74</sup> Mayhew, 271.

Despite cataloging the religiosity of the indigenous women, both Urtassum and Mayhew relied on exterior testimonies to authenticate the orthodoxy of the women. For Urtassum, priestly confessors generally served as the impartial witnesses to the women's holiness. Both Juana de Geronymo and Petronila de la Concepción, for example, discussed their spiritual progress with their confessors; the approval of Petronila's confessor was explicitly mentioned in the text, while that of Juana's is implied. In both *Indian Converts* and *La gracia triunfante*, the woman's testimony about her own spiritual life was not sufficient evidence of the veracity of those experiences, but had to be confirmed by outside sources. Mayhew usually called the opinions of others "testimony," and used it to validate the good character of the woman, drawing particularly upon the reports of male missionaries as well as indigenous men to construct his arguments.

In the early eighteenth century, therefore, even the most ardent supporters of Christianity among indigenous people viewed Native women within a certain framework. Indigenous women were still judged by their ability to comply with gender norms developed by European Christianity, which generally involved limits on sexual expression and submission to male authority figures. While "pro-indigenous" ministers like Urtassum or Mayhew believed that indigenous women could display Christian virtue, they still relied on the testimony of other people (typically white and male) to confirm these women's faith.

As the next section of this dissertation will show, these attitudes helped shape the approach of boarding schools that were established for the education of indigenous girls in Mexico and New England in the mid-eighteenth century. Nevertheless, through their cultural connections, literacy skills, and their own desires and determination, the female

students were able to navigate these basic presuppositions in ways that expanded their own avenues of influence and helped create a new definition of Christian indigeneity.

## Part One: Christian Schools for Indigenous Girls

*Caterina del Sacramento (most likely Nahua)* *Amy Johnson (Mohegan)*  
 was the first student to enter the school for indigenous girls, called  
*the Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* *Moor's Indian Charity School*  
 founded in  
*1753 in Mexico City, Mexico.* *1761 in Lebanon Crank, Connecticut.*

Under the aegis of eighteenth-century  
*Spanish* imperialism, *British*  
 the school's mission was to form indigenous girls in European gender  
 norms, instruct them in basic literacy, teach them domestic skills like  
 cooking, cleaning, and sewing, and prepare them to be wives and mothers  
 (or nuns)  
 in colonial society.

To accomplish these goals, the school's founder,  
*Jesuit priest Antonio Herdoñana* *Congregationalist minister Eleazar Wheelock*  
 imposed a daily structure that asserted control over every aspect  
 of the students' lives, from minute physical details like  
*their posture at Mass* *their seats in church*  
 to far-reaching efforts to shape their emotions through required  
*displays of gratitude.* *performances of repentance.*  
 Moreover, the school relied on the profits from students' labor of  
*making and selling food* *working as domestic servants*  
 while at the school in order to maintain financial stability.

Despite the pressure to conform to patriarchal gender norms and  
*Spanish Catholic* social values, students like *English Protestant*  
*Catherina del Sacramento* *Amy Johnson*  
 used the knowledge they gained at the school  
 to empower themselves and advocate for indigenous people.

They wielded their rhetorical skills to influence colonial officials,  
*held leadership positions at the school,*  
 and actively contributed to the creation and growth  
 of pan-indigenous networks in the region.  
 Their actions foreshadowed the establishment of exclusively Christian  
 Indian spaces by indigenous peoples in the late eighteenth century.

This is the story of Caterina, Amy, and their classmates.

**Chapter 1: “We the students”:  
Indigenous identity at the *Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, 1753-1811**

Ana Ventura Gómez was frustrated. Rumor had it that a girl of questionable parentage and racial background had been accepted into the boarding school called *Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* [School of Our Lady of Guadalupe], of which Ventura was a proud alumna. By accepting this student, she believed, the Guadalupe school had betrayed the values on which the school was founded. Her complaint, which she submitted to the viceregal court of Mexico, triggered a further investigation.<sup>1</sup> The entire issue, however, revolved around an unusual circumstance: the possibility that a girl of Spanish descent had been admitted to a school for indigenous girls. Ana Ventura Gómez was indigenous, and was adamant that only indigenous girls should be living within the walls of her alma mater.

The Guadalupe school was the largest institution dedicated to the education of indigenous girls in colonial Mexico, offering both a boarding school and a free daily school. At any given time between 1753 and 1811, the school boarded around 15 to 30 carefully selected indigenous girls, known as *colegialas*, who lived full-time at the school and received an advanced education. On a daily basis, dozens of girls of all races and ethnicities came to the Guadalupe school complex to receive a free education in basic literacy skills, taught by the *colegialas*. Colonial officials and the school’s founders saw the Guadalupe school as a tool of evangelization and Hispanicization; an effective way of shaping indigenous girls and young women to conform to the ideals of Catholicism and Spanish gender norms. Their educational initiative, however, had unexpected

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<sup>1</sup> Ana Ventura Gómez, letter to the viceroy, no date [circa 1790] AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 1311/6390/28, Exp 28, Case of Ana Ventura Gómez.

consequences: the students of the Guadalupe school used their literacy skills to defend indigenous rights, develop and advocate for their own understanding of ethnic identity, and transform the school itself into a hub of indigenous connections.

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In pre-Columbian times, girls living in the central valley of Mexico received an education mostly in domestic tasks: cooking, gardening, and medicinal knowledge. Beyond maintaining the household, indigenous women also developed skills that were used for both artistic and communicative purposes. Nahua women prided themselves especially on their textile skills: mothers gave their daughters essential training in weaving and yarn production. Women from the noble classes also learned embroidery with feathers (*plumería*), which was an important status symbol. Capes or cloaks decorated with these intricately placed small feathers were expensive and indicated the wealth and power of the wearer.

When Spanish missionaries began to arrive on the shores of the “New World,” they focused on educating indigenous people in the basics of the Christian faith, sometimes in a formalized school setting. In Mexico, these classes might have taken place in the sanctuary of a church, in a courtyard, or simply in the village center. A Royal Decree, issued by Felipe II in 1601, ordered that primary schools be built in all of the indigenous villages, preferably “one for girls and another for boys,” but if two schools were impossible, then the children should attend school together until the girls turned ten years old and would from that point forward be banned from the schools.<sup>2</sup> During the course of the seventeenth century, approximately 230 such schools were opened, mainly

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Josefina Muriel, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas: Fundaciones del siglo XVI* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004), 33.

for both sexes in the same location.<sup>3</sup> According to the Spanish historian and Franciscan friar Gerónimo de Mendieta, typically the boys would go inside the school for instruction in reading and writing, while the girls would remain outside, in the patio, and learn their catechism by call-and-response style oral repetition.<sup>4</sup> Spanish priests and missionaries were often assisted in their teaching by indigenous catechists who spoke the local language. In fact, in these systems, girls were much more likely to be taught by an indigenous person, either male or female, than the boys: because the Spanish missionaries believed that the boys' training in literacy was more important, they tended to take it on themselves, and only delegate the girls' education.<sup>5</sup>

In the early sixteenth century, there were a few attempts to provide indigenous women with further education in reading and writing, beyond the primary level offered by missionaries. In the mid-1520s, Catalina de Bustamante, wife of a Spanish conquistador, opened a home for indigenous girls in Texcoco, where she taught them religion, domestic chores, and basic literary skills. This home was also designed to protect indigenous women from the sexual advances of conquistadors. Unfortunately, the school failed to achieve this goal: in 1529, two students were raped by Spanish men who had scaled the walls of the school and entered the rooms where students slept.<sup>6</sup> A second home for indigenous girls opened under the initiative of Isabella of Portugal, the wife of Spanish king and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Isabella sponsored the journey of six Spanish women to Mexico, where she instructed them to “dedicate themselves to the

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<sup>3</sup> Muriel, 35.

<sup>4</sup> See José de Jesús Vega and María Luisa Cárdenas de Vega, *América virreinal: la educación de la mujer, 1503-1821* (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1989), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, “Escuelas, Colegios, y Conventos Para Niñas y Mujeres Indígenas En El Siglo XVIII,” in *Obedecer, Servir, y Resistir: La Educación de Las Mujeres En La Historia de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003), 45.

<sup>6</sup> Vega and Vega, *América virreinal*, 18.

instruction of Indian girls in that land.”<sup>7</sup> These women were *beatas*, neither nuns nor married, who then opened a *beatorio* (home for women) in Mexico City in 1534. They accepted Spanish, *mestiza* (mixed-race), and indigenous girls from the noble classes into their *beatorio*, where they provided a formation in religion as well as a basic education.

Indigenous leaders, however, were wary of these educational efforts. Fathers worried about the consequences of handing their daughters over to be educated by the Spanish conquerors.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, indigenous men reportedly began to refuse to marry girls who had grown up in the *beatorios* and boarding schools, arguing that they did not know how to be wives to Indians.<sup>9</sup> The difficulties of convincing indigenous girls to join a *beatorio*, coupled with the increasing numbers of Spanish and *mestiza* girls in Mexico, caused a shift in educational focus away from indigenous students. The *Colegio de Niñas* (School for Girls), established in Mexico City in 1548, soon became the most important educational center for women in New Spain, but indigenous students were not allowed to enroll there. The indigenous-focused *beatorios*, for their part, died out over the next few decades.<sup>10</sup> Up until the mid-eighteenth century, therefore, the primary way for indigenous girls to receive training in Spanish language, basic literacy skills, and catechesis was through local schools on somewhat of an ad hoc basis.

In contrast, male indigenous students had access to formal education in Mexico throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Two schools for indigenous boys, the *Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco* and the *Colegio de San*

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<sup>7</sup> Real Cédula, 12 May 1534, quoted in Vega and Vega, 37.

<sup>8</sup> José María Kobayashi, *La Educación Como Conquista* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1974), 287.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly: The Institutional and Cultural Practice of Recogimiento in Colonial Lima* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Howe, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 124.

Gregorio, were founded by the Franciscans and Jesuits, respectively, in 1536 and 1586. In both schools, students lived on-site and received an education in language and religion, preparing students to assist in the conversion of the native population, primarily through translation. While Santa Cruz was designated exclusively for members of the nobility, San Gregorio did accept students who were from the commoner class as well. Several dozen driven and well-connected indigenous students also enrolled in the University of Mexico, which primarily served the creole population, where they were able to graduate with a bachelor's degree.<sup>11</sup> The availability of educational opportunities for indigenous boys waxed and waned during the colonial period depending on royal and vice-regal desire to support indigenous schools, the financial stability of these schools, and requirements surrounding race and social class. Nevertheless, male indigenous students always had some type of access to higher education in colonial Mexico, while these types of opportunities for female students had effectively closed by 1550.

Late seventeenth-century reforms, however, revitalized the question of indigenous education. During the monarchy of Charles II, Spanish imperial policy embraced an official policy of assimilation for indigenous people, a marked difference from the earlier "two republic" approach that had designated indigenous peoples as a separate political entity. After a century and a half of evangelization, the Crown believed, educational policies needed to change in order to force indigenous populations into full assimilation with Spanish religion and culture. A series of royal decrees from the Spanish monarchs

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<sup>11</sup> See Margarita Menegus Bornemann, "Los Estudiantes Indígenas de Oaxaca En La Real Universidad de Mexico," *Acervos: Boletín de Ls Archivos y Bibliotecas de Oaxaca*, no. 25 (Spring 2002): 28–34; Margarita Menegus Bornemann and Rodolfo Aguirre Salvador, *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVIII* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2006); Mónica Díaz, "The Education of Natives, Creole Clerics, and the Mexican Enlightenment," *Colonial Latin American Review* 24, no. 1 (March 2015): 60–83; Matthew D. O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in Mexico, 1749–1857* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009), chapter 2.

beginning in the late seventeenth century emphasized the importance of teaching indigenous children to speak Spanish through mandatory and widespread primary education.<sup>12</sup> If the children spoke Spanish, the argument went, children would better understand the Catholic faith and priests would no longer have to rely on translators to convey their message. Most importantly, fluency in Spanish would make it harder to disguise indigenous religious practice under the guise of innocent misunderstandings.<sup>13</sup> As one monk wrote to the king in a 1734 report on schools in Oaxaca: “Knowledge of our language made it easier for the Indians to understand the mysteries of the Christian faith, and the fruit of this is the frequent denunciations of teachers of idolatry.”<sup>14</sup> The decrees not only mandated the creation of primary schools, but, for the first time, put certain tax measures in place to ensure a financial base for education.

Moreover, Enlightenment ideals encouraged a greater emphasis on education for women. Leading Spanish philosopher Gerónimo Feijóo y Montenegro, for example, published a defense of women’s education in 1739 called the *Essay on Woman, or Physiological and Historical Defence of the Fair Sex*.<sup>15</sup> Competition with other empires, particularly France and England, pushed Spaniards to modernize their educational system. Over the eighteenth century, Spanish conceptualization of women’s education moved away from schools as a place created for women’s protection, to one that prepared

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<sup>12</sup> Examples include Royal Decrees in 1688, 1691, and 1693 that mandated the foundation of primary schools. See Tanck de Estrada, “Escuelas, Colegios, y Conventos Para Niñas y Mujeres Indígenas En El Siglo XVIII,” 46.

<sup>13</sup> Deborah Ellen Kanter, “Indian Education in Late Colonial Mexico: Policy and Practice” (Master’s Thesis: University of Virginia, 1987), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Fray Santiago Calderón to King Charles II, 12 Nov 1734, quoted in Francisco Canterla and Martin de Tovar, *La Iglesia de Oaxaca en el siglo XVIII* (Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1982), 92.

<sup>15</sup> Silvia Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 16.

them for full participation in society. “Enlightened reformers wanted to educate women in the broadest sense of the term,” historian Silvia Arrom has explained, “to prepare responsible mothers, thrifty housewives, and useful companions for men.”<sup>16</sup> In their future roles as helpmeets to their husbands and managers of their homes, literacy came to be seen as a more important skill for women than it had been in previous centuries.<sup>17</sup> Small in-home schools, called *miga* schools (a shortening of the Spanish word *amiga*, female friend), began to flourish, where a female instructor would teach young girls basic literacy skills along with housekeeping and social graces. The increasing importance of education for girls also lent itself to arguments in favor of formal education for indigenous girls: with the correct formation, Spanish authorities believed, indigenous girls could become mothers who would raise their children to become contributing members of colonial Spanish society.

In 1753, these cultural shifts opened the door for the creation of a school for indigenous girls in Mexico City. Founded by a Jesuit priest, the Guadalupe school would operate for over fifty years, welcoming boarding students from indigenous communities in and around the Valley of Mexico. The school was governed by the same principles that shaped Spanish colonial society: the students were expected to submit to a comprehensive list of rules and regulations intended to form their characters and mold their daily lives into the ideals of Spanish womanhood. Despite these goals, students at the school also became empowered by their literacy and understanding of Spanish legal systems, which allowed them to navigate colonial society and defend their own rights.

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<sup>16</sup> Arrom, 11.

<sup>17</sup> María Adelina Arredondo, “Introducción,” in *Obedecer, Servir, y Resistir: La Educación de Las Mujeres En La Historia de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003), 9.

Moreover, the Guadalupe school itself served as a nexus for indigenous networks across Mexico City. As an institution, the school was designed to compel indigenous students to conform to Spanish ideals, but it unintentionally also strengthened indigenous identity and amplified the voices of indigenous women.

### **History of the Guadalupe School**

The idea for the Guadalupe school originated with Jesuit priest Antonio Modesto Martínez Herdoñana. In many ways, he was a typical late-colonial benefactor of indigenous groups: born into a wealthy and elite Creole family and willing to deploy and demonstrate his largesse in pursuit of social improvements. When he was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1733, Herdoñana was assigned to the Colegio de San Gregorio, the Jesuit-run school for indigenous boys. There, he gained a reputation as a particularly devoted confessor, often staying in the church late into the night to hear the confessions of indigenous men and women.<sup>18</sup> In 1743, his mother, Ángela Roldán, passed away, and left a sizable donation for the San Gregorio school. Herdoñana decided to use part of these funds to establish a new school for indigenous girls.

The idea of a school for girls reflected Herdoñana's position as a Creole intellectual during a time of transition in the eighteenth century. Missionaries and evangelists in the seventeenth century and earlier had advocated for institutions that would protect pure indigenous women from the rapaciousness of both Spanish and indigenous men. By the nineteenth century, reformers would focus more on

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<sup>18</sup> Much of the biographical information about Herdoñana's life comes from Juan Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana* (Mexico City: Imprenta de la Biblioteca Mexicana, 1758); See also Lucas Alamán, *Diccionario universal de historia y de geografía...sobre la Republica Mexicana* (Mexico City: Imprenta de F. Escalante, 1856), 547–50; Antonio García Cubas, *Diccionario geográfico, histórico y biográfico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Murguia, 1888), 200–201.

homogenizing and erasing indigenous cultures through education. Herdoñana and his peers straddled both views. Fellow Jesuit Juan de Mayora, who wrote a biography of Herdoñana in 1758, explained that Herdoñana hoped that his school would provide a safe harbor for indigenous girls who “are called to [Christian] perfection but...are unable to go beyond the first steps of virtue due to the circumstances into which they are born and are unable to flee.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, Herdoñana’s institution was intended to be more like a *recogimiento*, a convent-like refuge for indigenous women seeking to escape the inherent evil of their culture and ethnicity. At other times, however, Herdoñana emphasized the educational goals of his institution, defining it as a place where girls would come to gain knowledge. The final school charter, for example, described the Guadalupe school as a place where students would learn to “read and write Spanish, and other things necessary for civil society” – thereby fulfilling the educational goals gaining ascendance in the late eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Over the years, the Guadalupe institution became more clearly a school: although a few documents from the 1750s referred to it as a *recogimiento*, that description disappeared within the first decade of the school’s operation.

The school focused on training indigenous girls to become either good Christian wives and mothers, or nuns. Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, a historian of education, argued that the focus on future motherhood was the “primary objective” of indigenous education in the late eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Herdoñana made it clear that he believed that “one of the best ways of winning souls for God consists in the upbringing of girls, who like tender

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<sup>19</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 30–31.

<sup>20</sup> Constitution and Real Cédula, 13 May 1759, Archivo General de la Nación [hereafter AGN], Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016.

<sup>21</sup> Tanck de Estrada, “Escuelas, Colegios, y Conventos Para Niñas y Mujeres Indígenas En El Siglo XVIII,” 59–60.

plants, are mostly likely to hold firm to the path of salvation, and by winning just one girl, the entire family may be obtained.”<sup>22</sup> He would later instruct the students that they must “attend not only to their own salvation...but to cooperate with the salvation of their relatives.”<sup>23</sup> By forming indigenous women to become mothers, Herdoñana could hope to impact future generations as well.

The school would also prepare students to become nuns. Herdoñana specified that any student who showed an inclination to enter the convent should be taught how to read and use the breviary, a special prayer book used by nuns that included a complicated rotating system of annual, seasonal, and daily prayers to align with the feasts of the Church. Participation in the school choir offered the students another opportunity to develop a skill that would be useful to them in a convent. A few years after the school opened, Herdoñana’s biographer argued that the students’ dedication to the school rules demonstrated their ability to become nuns and observe the religious statutes of a convent.<sup>24</sup> Herdoñana’s school, therefore, would not only form women for marriage, but also give them the tools to realize one of the highest callings available to Catholic women: entrance into a convent. As we will see later, this type of formation empowered women in ways unforeseen by Herdoñana.

In order to impact as many girls as possible, Herdoñana devised a two-tiered system of education. The oldest and most advanced students would be known as *colegialas* (which loosely translates to boarding student). The *colegialas* were older

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<sup>22</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 9v.

<sup>23</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 2v.

<sup>24</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 35.

students who would live at the at the school full-time, and agree to abide by strict guidelines controlling their behavior and daily activities. They then became responsible for teaching a second group of students, known as pupils or external students. These students came to the school on a daily basis, going home each night, and received a free, albeit simple, education, along the lines of the *miga* schools frequented by non-indigenous girls: instruction in the basic elements of Catholicism and Spanish, and some rudiments of reading and writing. In this way, the school's educational efforts would impact not only the students who lived there, but also the surrounding population, who might not be willing or able to send their daughters to live at the school. These students were probably primarily indigenous, given the neighborhood, but the free school was open to girls of any race. Within this two-tiered system, the *colegialas* were the heart and soul of the operation: many of the students who entered as *colegialas* in their teenage years remained at the school for decades, becoming teachers and gaining a voice in the governance of the school.

Although Herdoñana's proposed school in many ways reflected prevailing social beliefs about indigeneity, education, and gender roles, he did encounter some opposition. According to Herdoñana's biographer, Juan de Mayora, "there were some who wanted to create severe obstacles to the foundation of the *Colegio de Guadalupe de Niñas Inditas*, and worked hard to oppose it, and to portray it as far beyond the Indian Nation."<sup>25</sup> Some of those opposed, Mayora explained, believed that the Indians were destined to be inferior due to the "duskiness" of their skin, and thus education for indigenous girls would be a waste. Others thought that the students would never be able to comply with

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<sup>25</sup> Mayora, 53.

the school constitution proposed by Herdoñana, which were based on the same rules followed by all Jesuit priests. These accusations echoed the arguments put forward by opponents of the Corpus Christi convent, three decades earlier. Educating indigenous girls, the opponents argued, would either be a waste because indigenous people were inherently intellectually inferior, or impossible because the indigenous girls would be unable to comply with the rules. Herdoñana was apparently willing to compromise in order to gain more approval for the school. In response to these questions, he scrapped half of his proposed rules, creating a softer school constitution.

Overall, however, Herdoñana's plan received official approval fairly quickly; the objections that Mayora described never appeared in the public records of the approval process. The current archbishop of Mexico City, Manuel José Rubio y Salinas (1749-1765), was a strong proponent of education in general – he spearheaded the creation of over two hundred local primary during his tenure – and supported Herdoñana's plan.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the monetary donation from Angela Rodan's estate, Herdoñana's mother, meant that Herdoñana did not have to seek additional funding from external sources, simply the official permission to open. Herdoñana filed official paperwork with the diocese in June 1753 and received approval in less than six months.

With his school charter approval in hand, Herdoñana could begin to make his plan a reality. He selected a location for the school grounds just around the corner from San Gregorio, on the border between the Spanish colonial city center and one of the more populous indigenous barrios, San Sebastián, also known as Atzacualco.<sup>27</sup> The school

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<sup>26</sup> Kanter, "Indian Education in Late Colonial Mexico: Policy and Practice," 21.

<sup>27</sup> Pilar Foz y Foz, *La Revolución Pedagógica En Nueva España, 1754-1820: María Ignacia de Azlor y Echeverz y Los Colegios de La Enseñanza*, vol. 1 (Madrid: Instituto "Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo C.S.I.C.", 1981), 418.

itself consisted of a single building with two patios inside, connected by a passageway, with a prayer room, a dormitory, a workroom, and a kitchen.<sup>28</sup> On December 12, 1753, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, fifteen *colegialas* entered to serve as founding students of the new school. The school operated with around fifteen to twenty-two *colegialas* at a time for the first few decades of the school, with somewhere between forty and ninety external students attending classes on a regular basis.<sup>29</sup>

The initial years of the school, however, were marked by scarcity. It was probably not helped by the fact that Herdoñana died in 1758, which likely prevented him from securing other donors. His successor, Father Juan de Mayora, was able to obtain royal patronage for the institution, transforming it into the “Royal College of Our Lady of Guadalupe” in 1759, and securing a yearly donation from the Crown’s coffers, but the school nevertheless struggled to survive. The dormitories were drafty, cold, and damp, and the school buildings were cramped. “We maintained ourselves despite many discomforts and hardships,” testified some of the founding *colegialas*, several years later.<sup>30</sup> A 1769 report on the state of the school identified corn as the main source of food for the students, with bread being offered when the budget allowed.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> José María Marroqui and Luis González Obregón, *La ciudad de México: contiene el origen de los nombres de muchas de sus calles y plazas, del de varios establecimientos públicos y privados, y no pocas noticias curiosas y entretenidas* (Mexico City: Tip. y Lit. “La Europea,” de J. Aguilar Vera y Ca., 1903), 11.

<sup>29</sup> Mayora, *Relación*, 54; Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016; Razon compendiosa del estado del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Indias doncellas de esta corte, 17 May 1769, Biblioteca Nacional de España [hereafter BNE] MSS 3535; Diligencias ejecutadas...en que se hallan el estado del Colegio de Indias de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, 1781, BNE, MSS 3535.

<sup>30</sup> Diligencias ejecutadas...en que se hallan el estado del Colegio de Indias de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, 1781, BNE, MSS 3535.

<sup>31</sup> Razon compendiosa del estado del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Indias doncellas de esta corte, 17 May 1769, BNE, MSS 3535.

Things improved dramatically for the school when Don Francisco Gamboa was appointed the school's new "Protector" in 1774. This position spanned a range of duties from head of the school, to legal representative, to overall benefactor and advocate. From the start, Gamboa was determined to do his best by the school, as well as for San Gregorio, the neighboring Indian boys' school, where he was also the protector. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, and trained as a lawyer, Gamboa had vigorously defended the rights of indigenous communities in a broader proto-national claim of local sovereignty in his 1761 publication, *Commentaries on the Mining Ordinances of Spain*.<sup>32</sup>

Gamboa threw himself whole-heartedly into improving conditions at the Guadalupe school. First, he built a public chapel onto the school, which helped attract more people to visit the schoolgrounds, and increased the number of donations for Masses said. He conducted vigorous fundraising campaigns among the elites of New Spain, including, most notably, the viceroy Antonio de Obregón y Álvarez. With this money, he was able to purchase two houses contiguous to the school, and transform them into additional classrooms, workrooms, sleeping areas, and patios. Furthermore, he updated the existing school buildings by adding a third staircase between the two levels, a cellar, and a new entryway. Enrollment of *colegialas* in the school increased to around 25 to 30 students for the remainder of the school's existence. Under Gamboa's patronage, the Guadalupe school became a center of activity and a city landmark.

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<sup>32</sup> Mariano Otero, "Apuntes para la biografía de don Francisco Javier Gamboa, 1843. Republished," *Revista de la Facultad de Derecho de México*, no. 105–106 (January 1, 1977): 347–68; Christopher Albi, "Law and Colonial Reform in the 18th Century Spanish World: The Life of Francisco Xavier Gamboa, Mexican Lawyer," in *Atlantic Biographies: Individuals and Peoples in the Atlantic World*, by Jeffrey A. Fortin and Mark Meuwese (Boston: Brill, 2013), 235–62.

## Daily Life at the School

At Guadalupe, students entered a world of strict rules and regulations. Herdoñana's daily schedule for the *colegialas* infused every hour with purpose, intended to shape their characters and train them in useful skills. Compliance was necessary not only for students' own development, but because the school itself relied on their labor: students were expected to cook, clean, and produce baked goods for sale, all of which helped the school survive on a shoestring budget. The school operated with a clear schedule and assigned tasks to each student, giving Catholicism (required prayertimes, etc.) and labor (time set aside for work) nearly equal weight, with education in literacy following a distant third. Other rules mandated the types of clothing that students could wear and limited their contact with their families and home communities. Clearly, Herdoñana envisioned the school primarily as a vehicle for the Hispanicization of indigenous women.

The school operated under the umbrella of the Society of Jesus, although the fact that the Jesuits were an all-male order made their administration of the school slightly more complicated. Nevertheless, the Jesuits chose the school's initial headmistress, heard her confessions, and guided her governance of the school.<sup>33</sup> Other reminders of Jesuit and Church authority impacted all the school members. At the beginning of every month, the entirety of the school constitution was read to the students during dinner, "so that the perfect compliance with this instruction, rule, or method may be more easily obtained."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 34. When the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico and all of the Spanish colonies, the archdiocese took control of the school, and diocesan priests were assigned to serve as the school's directors.

<sup>34</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016.

It was also typical for the bishop to make a visit to the school every few years, to confirm that everything in order – as he would have done with local convents as well.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, in many ways, daily life at the school echoed the typical pattern of a convent. Days at the school began early, with a wake-up call at four o'clock in the morning, followed by a mix of religious obligations – individual silent prayers, communal prayers, confession, and Mass – that occupied the hours from 4:30 am until 7 am. After a break for breakfast and straightening up their rooms, students spent the morning working on their various jobs, accompanied by one student reading out loud from a spiritual book. At noon, students participated in an examination of conscience, followed by lunch and some time for rest. The afternoon was filled with similar work before a rosary, dinner, and time for recreation before bedtime at 9 pm.<sup>36</sup> This schedule reflects the somewhat liminal space that the foundation occupied between a *recogimiento* and a school. *Recogimientos*, common in colonial Iberoamerica, were places designed to protect women and promote Catholic spirituality. Their specific function varied based on the time period and whether women or girls joined them voluntarily or were forced to join, but generally ranged from something like an orphanage or reform-school to a convent-like setting. As mentioned earlier, Herdoñana's founding documents sometimes used the term *recogimiento* to describe the new initiative, although the final title of his proposal did use the word school. In his daily schedule, however, he gave little time to educational instruction, and emphasized instead the elements that focused on spirituality, making the new institution more like a convent or *recogimiento*.

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<sup>35</sup> Carmen Castañeda and Myrna Cortés, "Educación y Protección de Mujeres En Guadalajara En La Primera Mitad Del Siglo XIX," in *Obedecer, Servir, y Resistir: La Educación de Las Mujeres En La Historia de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003), 65.

<sup>36</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 49–52.

In fact, the educational component of the school was never very clear. Existing sources give conflicting reports about the students' level of academic achievement. A scribe visiting the school in 1781 noted that the *colegialas* were "very well educated and fully knowledgeable of the Spanish language." In that same report, the *colegialas* themselves testified that they were able to teach the external students "the basics of our Holy Faith, and to pray, read, and write."<sup>37</sup> Sometime in the late 1770s, a music teacher had been hired to teach the students to sing the parts of the Mass, which meant that some students acquired a basic level of literacy in Latin as well.<sup>38</sup> José Antonio de Alzate y Ramírez, a scientist and priest, noted in 1791 that the school had 150 *colegialas* and a "free school for girls from the street, to whom they teach how to pray, read, and all types of sewing and embroidery."<sup>39</sup> (Most likely, Alzate accidentally combined the number of *colegialas* and external students to arrive at his number of 150; no other records for the school show that the number of *colegialas* ever rose above 30.) In general, these reports give the impression that the *colegialas*, at least, had strong literacy skills in Spanish.

On the other hand, not all of the *colegialas* achieved this level. An 1806 document signed in 1806 by 26 *colegialas* indicated that only nineteen of them could sign their names. The other seven, including one woman who had been at the school since at least 1782, did not know how to write their own names. Another *colegiala* signed on their behalf.<sup>40</sup> The school constitution specified that reading and writing should be taught to

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<sup>37</sup> Diligencias ejecutadas...en que se hallan el estado del Colegio de Indias de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, 1781, BNE, MSS 3535.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Tanck de Estrada, "Escuelas, Colegios, y Conventos Para Niñas y Mujeres Indígenas En El Siglo XVIII," 52.

<sup>40</sup> María Petra Elviro et al, letter to viceroy, 21 March 1806, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Regio Patronato Indiano/Colegios/Volumen 8, Exp 3. I compared this list of 28 *colegialas* with the school records from 1782 and found that eight of the 1806 signers had been *colegialas* at the school since 1782, while

“those to whom it would be useful.”<sup>41</sup> Most likely, only a certain group of students learned the full breadth of literary expression, while others received more training in domestic skills.

The daily schedule did reflect the importance of students’ labor to the school project. Herdoñana had always anticipated that the Guadalupe school would operate on the income the students would earn by working, supplemented by the interest generated by his mother’s 40,000 peso donation.<sup>42</sup> With this combination, the school barely managed to stay in the black. A 1769 report by the school’s rector, Diego Joseph Rotana, calculated that the school’s income and expenditures were almost identical, leaving the school with only 334 pesos to carry over to the next year. Given this situation, Rotana explained that he did the best he could to purchase corn and bread at low prices, and that the students “also help through their work.”<sup>43</sup> Herdoñana’s biographer, Juan de Mayora, had a similar understanding of the school’s financial situation: “By soliciting mending, and selling ground chocolate...the students help pay for the school’s expenses, and thus they survive, without much to spare,” he explained.<sup>44</sup> While the school was envisioned as a charitable institution for indigenous girls, it also depended on the labor of its own students to maintain fiscal stability.

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another three signers had possibly been external students in 1782 (the students’ first names matched, but the list of external students did not give last names).

<sup>41</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016.

<sup>42</sup> Foz y Foz, 1:418.

<sup>43</sup> Razon compendiosa del estado del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Indias doncellas de esta corte, 17 May 1769, BNE, MS 3535.

<sup>44</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 54.

Primarily, the school was known for the chocolates and baked goods it sold. In his early 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Mexico City, José Marroquí waxed poetic about the school's desserts, which must have made an impact on the general memory:

They prepared all types of food, making sweets, cookies, cakes, and other desserts, and also prepared cocoa. With this labor, they did not only contribute to their own sustenance and personal expenses, but also provided the public with an important service: many unmarried men, priests, schoolboys, widows, travelers, and others, found food there that was cheap, clean, and flavorful, although none of them ate there, they could only retrieve it there. The convents, schools, and some individual families ordered their cocoa, sweets, and other things from the school, and banquet food was also prepared there. Overall, great cooks were formed in that school.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, some historians believe that the school's method of preparing food contributed to the creation of a uniquely Mexican culinary tradition, influencing the development of *mole*, *pozole*, and *tamales* that would become the staples of Mexican tables.<sup>46</sup> Although students from the school went on to become mothers, wives, and nuns, it seems the best-known product from the school was the baked goods produced by the students.

Even when Francisco Gamboa secured more funding for the school in the mid-1770s, this focus on selling baked goods remained. In fact, he spent a great deal of the donations that he secured in renovating and enlarging the work areas. He bought two houses contiguous to the school, and transformed one into a chocolate workshop, and the other into a bakery with a new oven. He built a kiosk on the new schoolgrounds specifically dedicated to selling chocolates. In the backyard, he added a chicken coop, presumably so that the school would always have a source of eggs as well as chicken meat. Gamboa's emphasis on creating larger and more productive workspaces indicates

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<sup>45</sup> Marroquí and Obregón, *La ciudad de México*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Rafael R. Fierro Gossman, *Templo del Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo: Museo de la Luz: 400 años de historia* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2003), 70.

that the students' labor was not just a question of economic necessity. Rather, it was an essential part of the students' formation at the school. As historian Pilar Gonzalbo writes, "Industry and temperance were viewed as fundamental virtues" at the school, and the "heavy labor" of chocolate work and baking, as opposed to more traditional female student labors such as embroidery, were intended to "work against the dangers of idleness."<sup>47</sup> As Gonzalbo points out, making chocolate was a physically demanding task in the early modern period, requiring grinding with a mortar and pestle to create a paste with the correct consistency. Europeans had long stereotyped indigenous people as lazy and shiftless; the Guadalupe school approach was designed to be an antidote to these supposedly innate failings.

An effort to establish another school similar to Guadalupe, although ultimately unsuccessful, would have placed even more emphasis on indigenous' girls labor. Doña María Gertrudis Lardizábal y Uribe, a wealthy donor, and Father Pedro Rangel, the chaplain at the Convent of Corpus Christi, proposed a school for indigenous girls located next to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Angels, in the Tlatelolco neighborhood. At this school, the students, exclusively indigenous girls, would dedicate themselves to "cleaning and maintaining the Church and washing the church linens, while with great care and effort they would also...be taught Christian doctrine and the initial basics of reading and writing, as well as the occupations and skills of their sex."<sup>48</sup> When José Cayetano de Foncerrada, a priest and lawyer, investigated the plan on behalf of the Spanish monarchy, he recommended that the school be approved for similar reasons. The proposed project

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<sup>47</sup> Pilar Gonzalbo, *La educación popular de los jesuitas* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1989), 180.

<sup>48</sup> Petition of M Gertrudis Lardizábal y Uribe, 23 January 1802, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Bienes Nacionales/Caja 1376/32099/12/Exp 12.

was not only “pious, but also advisable, and even necessary” insofar as it ensured that the Shrine would be “properly cleaned, and that the necessary linens would be cleaned and decently prepared [for use on the altar].”<sup>49</sup> Although the school was never opened – construction was abandoned during the political and economic turmoil of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – it appears as if the primary purpose of the school would have been obtaining the labor of the indigenous girls, with education being a secondary benefit.<sup>50</sup>

This emphasis on labor was extremely gendered. At San Gregorio, the indigenous school for boys in Mexico City, students were not expected to work. Instead, the school was dedicated to teaching indigenous *caciques* to read and write, in order that they “had the necessary aptitude for governing their people” under Spanish colonialism.<sup>51</sup>

Advanced students (*colegiales*) also received training in philosophy, theology, and music.<sup>52</sup> Unlike at the Guadalupe school, these advanced students were not expected to work as teachers for the younger students. Although the employment of the Guadalupe school *colegialas* as teachers gained them a certain amount of respect and prominence, San Gregorio *colegiales* achieved similar positions of authority – such as acolytes, lectors, or church musicians – that involved less daily labor.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, when it came to domestic work, the Guadalupe students’ labor directly served the San Gregorio students.

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<sup>49</sup> Declaration of José Cayatano de Foncerrada, 30 October 1802, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Bienes Nacionales/Caja 1376/32099/12/Exp 12.

<sup>50</sup> The school would have been partly funded by a charitable gift in the will of Doña Gertrudis de Lardizábal y Uribe’s father, which was withdrawn in 1814 because the construction site was “abandoned, useless, and almost completely destroyed, without hope that construction could continue.” Declaration of Doña Gerturdis de Lardizábal y Uribe, 12 September 1814, AGN, Regio Patronato Indiano/Capellanías/Vol 134, Exp 176,.

<sup>51</sup> Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, *La Educacion Ilustrada, 1786-1836: Educacion PriMaría En La Ciudad de Mexico* (Mexico City: El Colegio de Mexico, 1977), 188.

<sup>52</sup> Ileana Schmidt Díaz de Leon, *Colegio Seminario de Indios de San Gregorio y el desarrollo de la indianidad en el centro de Mexico 1586 - 1856* (Guanajuato, Mexico: University of Guanajuato, 2012), 43.

<sup>53</sup> Of course, their hopes that indigenous men could be ordained priests would not be realized until the early eighteenth century, and even then, at an extremely low rate.

The female students cooked food and provided hot chocolate to the boys' school. Additionally, the Guadalupe students embroidered vestments for the priests at San Gregorio and sewed special outfits for the San Gregorio *colegiales*.<sup>54</sup> In comparison to the male students, therefore, female students bore a double burden: they were expected to productively contribute to the colonial project both as children (at the school) and as later on as wives, mothers, or nuns. In contrast, expectations for indigenous male students focused exclusively on adulthood.

In addition to the daily schedule, the Guadalupe school's constitution contained a multitude of rules and regulations that governed life at the school for the *colegialas*. One of the longest sections centered on students' clothing. "All the students must wear one specific outfit, provided by the school," the rules dictated. However, Herdoñana apparently feared that this general prohibition was not strong enough, because the rules also specified that the girls could not add any additional decoration to their outfits. "They cannot wear even a ribbon that does not come from the hand of the headmistress, and if one of their relatives gives a student something like this, they may only use it with the headmistress's permission."<sup>55</sup> This prohibition probably stemmed from the importance of embroidery and *plumeria* among indigenous groups in Mexico as a way of demonstrating artistic skill and displaying family heritage.<sup>56</sup> The Guadalupe school did not permit any variations in clothing that might reflect a student's particular indigenous identity.

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<sup>54</sup> Schmidt Diaz de Leon, *Colegio Seminario De Indios De San Gregorio*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 6v.

<sup>56</sup> See Kathryn Klein, *El Hilo Continuo: La Conservación de Las Tradiciones Textiles de Oaxaca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

The uniform policy was part of a larger effort by the school to homogenize the student population and separate the girls from their families. Located in an indigenous neighborhood within Mexico City, and next to the Colegio de San Gregorio for indigenous boys, with a student body drawn mainly from the same neighborhood, the school's administrators faced a constant struggle to govern the students' connections with their families. Just as in a convent, the students could only meet with their families in a designated location, the locutory, or visiting room, and only when the visits were pre-arranged. "In order to preserve the peaceful quiet [*recogimiento*] and learning of this house," the school charter stated, "each and every one must try to avoid as much as possible communication with the outside world, fleeing from and opposing pointless visits. In the locutory, only relatives may be admitted, and they must be warned not to bring other non-relatives with them."<sup>57</sup> Rules governing and limiting family visits were not unusual for girls' schools in Mexico City at the time, even in those institutions that served Spanish, Creole, or mestiza girls.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Herdoñana's emphasis on *completely* cutting ties with students' families and other community members (the "non-relatives" who might accompany families) was clearly connected with his larger project of Hispanicizing the indigenous students. Moreover, any mail sent to the girls at the school also had to go through the headmistress's hands. In the constitution, the headmistress was advised to keep an eye on the girls whose job entailed answering the door, to make sure that they turned over to her any communication for the students so that she could read it first. By preventing the girls from wearing any special apparel given

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<sup>57</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Muriel, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas*, 141.

to them by their families, or visiting with them too often, Herdoñana hoped to avoid any negative influences on the students from their indigenous connections.

A second clothing requirement governed nighttime apparel and served a slightly different purpose. The female students shared rooms, and the constitution specified that when getting ready for bed, they had to change clothes carefully with the utmost decency, and be fully covered with a nightgown and cap. If, for some reason, the students had to leave their rooms during the night, the nightgown alone was not sufficient: they had to make sure they were “decently attired.” These requirements echo some of the long-lasting concerns about indigenous women’s chastity. Even in a school for young girls, Spanish colonial authorities worried about the possibilities for indecency and exposure.

Overall, therefore, the general structure of life at the school was intended to form deeply Catholic, hard-working, indigenous women who would support the school with their labor as students, and go on to become nuns or mothers accustomed to an orderly schedule. Within a typical day, students had very little control, spending most of their time under the supervision and direction of school authorities. Only the assigned hour of recreation allowed much room for choice. This schedule reflected Herdoñana’s desire to have complete authority over the indigenous students who attended Guadalupe.

### **Interior formation**

While the daily schedule for the school and the rules about clothing attempted to govern students’ bodies, the Guadalupe school constitution also demanded control over students’ interior lives, proscribing certain attitudes and feelings that the students were required to display. The dominant required emotion was gratitude: as one of only a select few indigenous women who were able to receive an education, each student was

supposed to make daily, weekly, and monthly demonstrations of gratitude toward God, the school's founder, and other donors. Herdoñana also strove to inculcate a sense of familial devotion to the school, hoping that the creation of affective ties between the students and the school leadership would make school governance easier.

The Guadalupe school constitution itself dictated that students should “give thanks to God every day, without ceasing, for bringing them here and having chosen them out of so many others for this school.”<sup>59</sup> Specific methods for demonstrating this gratitude were proscribed by the constitution and enforced by the school leadership. Every week, the students were required to join together in praying a Rosary for the school donors and benefactors, and every month they were directed to “apply” the spiritual benefits of receiving Communion to a specific benefactor, as well as saying certain prayers to earn an indulgence for that person's soul after death.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, any time that the students attended Mass, they were supposed to kneel throughout the entire service, if their health permitted, rather than standing or sitting at the typical times. These religious practices, easily observable and enforceable by the school teachers and headmistress, were supposed to unite the physical and spiritual aspects of each student. Rules that governed the “exterior of the body,” such as what words in a prayer a student uttered or the position of her body during the Mass, would implicitly shape the “interior virtues of [her] soul.”<sup>61</sup>

External demonstrations of emotions, however, were not sufficient: Herdoñana explicitly tried to shape students' hearts and minds. For example, after describing the

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<sup>59</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 3-3v.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 7.

required expressions of gratitude, the constitution warned that these types of thanks must be given “with fervor and not just out of habit.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, merely performing the action was not enough: students should also feel gratitude deep within themselves. When corrected, students were supposed to accept these rebukes with “humility and patience” – attitudes that might have been reflected externally, but were primarily internal characteristics.<sup>63</sup> And while typical Jesuit practice included a daily examination of conscience, where a person reflects over their actions during the course of the day and identifies moments of sin and failure in order to repent, the school required students to complete this practice twice a day. As the constitution explained, students must “have a singular appreciation for this extremely important exercise, in which faults are recognized and regretted, and the desire to reform strengthened.”<sup>64</sup> Most likely, students were given a series of questions that prompted them to identify certain sins they may have committed during the day. The twice-daily examination of conscience, therefore, aimed to form students’ thoughts and feelings about their own actions. Overall, while the school constitution could only enforce external expressions of particular feelings, it certainly tried to shape students’ thoughts and interior lives as well.

The Guadalupe school constitution also contained guidelines for the school teachers and administrators, which painted a clear maternal role for them. The headmistress, for example, was entreated to embody a spirit of “charity, gentility, humility and prudence, in imitation of our meek and gentle Jesus.” She should be kind with the students, always willing to listen to their troubles with a patient ear and the “love

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<sup>62</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 3v.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 4v.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 7v.

of a mother,” and especially compassionate towards anyone suffering from illness.<sup>65</sup> The disposition of the headmistress was so important that Herdoñana added his own plea in the first person to the school constitution, the only time that his voice appears clearly rather than being glossed over. “Finally, in every way, act as if the students were your daughters, whom you are responsible for leading to heaven,” he wrote, “I order this with the greatest fervor.”<sup>66</sup> For Herdoñana it was of the utmost importance that the school replicate familial bonds between the students and the teachers.

Other sections of the constitution help explain why these affective connections were so essential. The students were also instructed to “obey and respect the headmistress as a mother that God gave them” and treat each other as “sisters in Christ.”<sup>67</sup> The headmistress, for her part, had to avoid any “appearance of superiority...giving orders only in order to comply with the will of God.”<sup>68</sup> When any transgression occurred, the headmistress was supposed to carefully correct the student’s fault while emphasizing her love for the student. Essentially, the school was supposed to govern itself based on “mutual charity and love.”<sup>69</sup> If all of the members of the school were dedicated to following the will of God and the love of neighbor, the constitution implied, any conflict that arose would be easily resolved.

In comparison to other schools for girls, the Guadalupe school constitution placed special emphasis on the familial bonds that should emerge between the headmistress and the students, differentiating their approach from others that served non-indigenous

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<sup>65</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 4v.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 5v.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 4, 5v.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 4v.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 5v.

students. For example, the school constitution for the *Colegio de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad*, founded in Mexico City in 1695 for Spanish and Creole girls, mandated that the students obey the headmistress as an authority figure, specifically, “as the head put in place...for their education, catechesis, and government.”<sup>70</sup> Educational practices, of course, did evolve over the eighteenth century, and student guidelines from the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century for a school for European-descendent girls also referred to the teachers as mothers.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the Guadalupe school’s early and strong emphasis on the headmistress’ role as a mother over the students suggests that the school founders believed that indigenous students needed a different type of relationship with authority than Creole or Spanish girls. It may have also reflected their belief that indigenous students had a deeper need for a maternal figure to guide them to the full practice of Catholicism and Spanish culture, since their biological mothers could not be expected to do so. While one of the Guadalupe school’s goals was the Hispanicization of indigenous girls, Herdoñana’s emphasis on maternal relationships indicates that indigenous students did not have the same experience as other Mexico City students. The Guadalupe school was intended to not only educate students, but also radically change the quality of their relationship with their families of origin and external authority figures.

Evidence demonstrates that these affective connections did in fact develop, at least among the school leadership. In a 1776 note to a school patron, inviting him to the opening of the new chapel at the school, headmistress María Petra Pérez informed him that the “sisters [*hermanitas*]” were well, using an affectionate diminutive for the other

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<sup>70</sup> Muriel, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas*, 219.

<sup>71</sup> “Reglamento de las Colegialas de Aguascalientes,” quoted in Pilar Foz y Foz, *La Revolución Pedagógica En Nueva España, 1754-1820: María Ignacia de Azlor y Echeverz y Los Colegios de La Enseñanza*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Instituto “Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo C.S.I.C.,” 1981).

members of the school.<sup>72</sup> One of the school directors, Francisco Xavier de Gamboa, was described by colonial officials as a “very zealous and loving father” to the community.<sup>73</sup> The students, it seemed, also adapted this perspective. When María Petra Pérez died in 1782, Gamboa went to the school to select a new headmistress. One by one, the current students informed him that they would prefer María Marcela Petra Elviro as the new headmistress, because “the said Doña Marcela would treat them like a mother.”<sup>74</sup> The language of kinship espoused by the school constitution, therefore, was shared among school benefactors, administrators, teachers, and students as well.

Taken all together, the rules put into place at the Guadalupe school were designed to create an environment where girls would be shaped into Hispanicized, Catholic, women, ready to be productive members of colonial Mexican society. The daily schedule reflected Herdoñana’s emphasis on order, structure, prayer, and labor. These fundamental principles would last into the nineteenth century, and were even reinforced by the architecture of the school’s expansion in the mid-1770s. Additionally, Herdoñana strove to shape students’ emotions. In order to inculcate an understanding of sin and virtue, Herdoñana required certain daily expressions of gratitude and examination of conscience from the students, while constantly emphasizing the importance of filial obedience.

### **Indigenous Identity**

Despite all of the abovementioned forces compelling them to conform with colonial gender norms, the Guadalupe students used their time at the school to strengthen indigenous identity across Mexico City, and leverage their positionality into a greater

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<sup>72</sup> María Petra Pérez, letter to Francisco Xavier Gamboa, 19 April 1776, BNE, MSS 3535..

<sup>73</sup> Dilegencias ejecutadas...en que se hallan el estado del Colegio de Indias de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, 1781, BNE, MSS 3535.

<sup>74</sup> Francisco Xavier Gamboa, letter to Martín de Mayorga Ferrer, December 1782, BNE MSS 3535.

ability to advocate for themselves and their families. Throughout its existence, the Guadalupe school remained an institution dedicated exclusively to the education of indigenous girls. This made a certain level of focus on indigeneity a necessary part of the school project, even in the eyes of the colonial founders. Moreover, indigenous women could attain leadership positions within the school, which then brought them into contact with high-ranking colonial officials, thereby increasing their influence on society. Most importantly, however, the actions of the Guadalupe school students themselves transformed their school into a nexus of Mexico City indigenous networks, strengthening indigenous connections and ethnic affiliation across *barrios* and institutions. They drew upon these connections to defend their rights as indigenous women in late colonial society.

The Guadalupe school constitution frequently reminded students of their indigenous identity. The *colegialas*, for example, were supposed to pray “for the blessed souls in purgatory, especially for those of your nation as being the most in need. Entrust them to God in all of your prayers.” Instructions for the external students was even more specific: “First of all, in all your prayers, both spoken and in silence, beg the Lord our God fervently every day for all sinners, and especially those of your nation, that their vices may be eradicated, and that they may persist in the Holy Catholic Faith that they have received.”<sup>75</sup> Clearly, these prescriptions for prayer were steeped in racialized judgement and negativity, describing indigenous people as particularly depraved and sinful. The fact that the school required indigenous girls to say these prayers, however, was empowering on a certain level as well. The prayers placed some of the responsibility

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<sup>75</sup> Constitution and Royal Approval for Guadalupe School, 13 May 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 4279, Exp. 016, 8v.

for the salvation of indigenous people in the hands of young girls, rather than making it the sole domain and responsibility of white male priests and missionaries. By emphasizing students' role in the supernatural battle for souls, these prayers may have helped students see themselves as agents of change.

Moreover, the prayers presented indigenous people as a separate nation. In doing so, they reminded the Guadalupe students of the specific rights and sufferings that indigenous people, as an ethnicity, had endured in Mexico. The idea of a separate indigenous polity came under attack under the Bourbon Reforms of the late eighteenth-century, which attempted to homogenize the Mexican population and create a single socio-racial hierarchy rather than the previously-established "two republics."<sup>76</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, however, the Guadalupe's schools' charge that students must pray for their fellow indigenous helped strengthen ethnic identity, in counter to the Bourbon ideals.

Students also held formal leadership positions at the school. From the first day, indigenous women at the Guadalupe school were assigned to teach the external pupils. These were selected based on the reputation they had established with Herdoñana as faithful attendees of San Gregorio; later on, many of the *colegialas* who entered the school would remain as teachers, vice-headmistresses, or headmistresses.<sup>77</sup> While the identity of the first headmistress is unknown, by at least 1774 one of the original indigenous *colegialas* was serving as headmistress, María Petra Estefanía Pérez.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See O'Hara, *A Flock Divided* for a fuller analysis of this process, especially as it related to religious institutions.

<sup>77</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 35.

<sup>78</sup> María Petra Pérez, letter to Don Francisco Gamboa, 14 March 1774, BNE MSS 3535.

Moreover, later documentation claims that only indigenous women ever lived at the school, suggesting that the first headmistress was also indigenous.

During her time as headmistress (circa 1774 until her death in 1782), María Petra Estefanía Pérez worked hard to establish and maintain relationships with wealthy patrons. She also oversaw a massive transformation in the school under Gamboa's fundraising and expansion efforts. In fact, although Gamboa never credited her directly as a source of inspiration, she may have been the initial impulse behind his project to secure more funding for the school. As soon as she heard that Gamboa had been appointed school protector, she wrote a letter to him, telling him that his appointment augured a "promise...not only for the sustenance of our school but the forward progress and improvements that are needed for our poor nation."<sup>79</sup> In pre-emptively thanking Gamboa for his generosity and dedication, Pérez displayed her mastery of the art of subtle persuasion, using her humble position as a woman to obligate men to help her and her community.

Pérez would go on to use these tools of literacy (most likely acquired at Guadalupe) and persuasion to influence other donors. For example, she worked to establish a relationship with the viceroy, Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, through gestures like sending him greetings on his name-day feast.<sup>80</sup> While it was common for the leaders of all religious institutions in Mexico to send letters to the viceroy on important days, Pérez was unusually deferential in her letter, describing herself as "prostrate at the feet of Thy Excellency, with all due respect, along with all the *colegialas*...desiring to

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<sup>79</sup> María Petra Pérez, letter to don Francisco Gamboa, 14 March 1774, BNE, MSS 3535.

<sup>80</sup> In colonial Mexico, a saint's feast day was also recognized as a day to celebrate any person named after that saint. Pérez greeted the viceroy on the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, June 13.

wish you a happy feast day.” She also included a gift of fresh fish, “that you might enjoy them on behalf of all of your daughters.”<sup>81</sup> Although this language sounds quite submissive, it accomplished two goals. Firstly, Pérez’s letter reinforced the idea that Bucareli should act with paternal affection towards the school, positioning the students as his loving daughters. Moreover, by presenting herself as a lowly woman sitting at the feet of the viceroy, Pérez increased the chances that Bucareli would look upon her with compassion and desire to care for her and the school. French theorist Roger Chartier calls this strategy the “religious rhetoric of the petition, which contrasts the humility of the solicitant and the greatness of the benefactor.”<sup>82</sup> This was a vaunted and, in many cases, highly effective strategy for women in colonial Mexico.<sup>83</sup> Within just a few years, the viceroy himself would make substantial donations to the school, enabling many of Gamboa’s remodels. It is difficult to say whether his support of the school was motivated by his friendship with Gamboa or the persuasiveness of Pérez’s letters, but most likely both had an influence. Throughout her writings, Pérez comes across as a warm personality fiercely dedicated to Guadalupe.

After Pérez’s death, another of the original founding members of the school succeeded her as headmistress. María Marcela Petra Elviro was one of only two of the founding *colegialas* to be still involved with the school in 1782, nearly thirty years after it opened; she would hold this position through at least 1806. Prior to being appointed headmistress, she had served as sacristan at the school complex, making sure that the

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<sup>81</sup> María Petra Pérez, letter to viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 12 June 1774, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>82</sup> Roger Chartier, *Libros, lecturas y lectores en la Edad Moderna / Books, Literature and Readers on the Modern Age*, trans. Mauro Armino (Madrid: Alianza Editorial SA, 1994), 304.

<sup>83</sup> Castañeda and Cortés, “Educación y Protección de Mujeres En Guadalajara En La Primara Mitad Del Siglo XIX,” 77.

altar cloths, bread, and wine were prepared and available for daily services. Notably, the woman who had served as Pérez' vice-headmistress, María Josefa de Castillo, was passed over for the headmistress role after Pérez' death, possibly because she was not one of the founding members. Either way, the other colegialas praised Elviro, saying that she was "not only an exemplary sacristan, but also had universal knowledge and direction of everything regarding the good of the community."<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Elviro was also ready to rule with a stern hand. When a former student of the school complained about some of the headmistress's decisions, Elviro was quick to discredit her as "resentful" and "with little fear of God."<sup>85</sup> Overall, Elviro remained in her post as headmistress until 1811 and lived with the community until her death in 1818, serving the school even as blindness and old age overtook her.<sup>86</sup> Like Pérez, Elviro's position as headmistress put her into contact with the viceregal court and colonial authorities, and made her an authoritative voice for the indigenous community within those circles.

Membership in the school also empowered indigenous girls beyond just those who served as headmistress. Most likely, enrollment in the school served to enhance the girls' prestige and their chances of making a good marriage, as well as increasing their families' access to wealthy patrons – at the very least, this was a primary motivation for Spanish and Creole girls to enroll in similar schools.<sup>87</sup> But the process of founding the school also seems to have rested partly on the approval of the students themselves.

Mayora recounted how Herdoñona had asked a group of girls if they were interested in

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<sup>84</sup> Appointment of María Marcela Petra Elviro, December 1784, BNE MSS 3535.

<sup>85</sup> Informe al Virrey, 8 May 1790, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 1311/6390/28, Exp 28.

<sup>86</sup> Foz y Foz, *La Revolución Pedagógica En Nueva España*, 1:432.

<sup>87</sup> Castañeda and Cortés, "Educación y Protección de Mujeres En Guadalajara En La Primara Mitad Del Siglo XIX," 73.

attending the school before he moved forward. “Father Antonio decided to found a school for Indian girls...and in order to give them the rules and method of life that they had to follow, he made a copy of the summary of our [Jesuit] constitution. ...And he called them, before making them *colegialas*, to a chapel in our church, and having read them the rules, asked if they were determined to observe them, not in letter only, but with enthusiasm? They responded yes.”<sup>88</sup> Only then did Herdoñona begin the process of officially founding the school. While this approval might have been only perfunctory or performative – the chances of the girls saying no seems rather slim – the fact that Herdoñona thought to ask them shows a certain respect for the girls’ agency. The very creation of the Guadalupe school involved the participation and support of indigenous women.

Being a part of the Guadalupe school helped amplify indigenous womens’ voices in other ways as well. For example, when Juan de Mayora wrote his biography of Herdoñana, he drew heavily upon female testimony to construct his image of Herdoñana. In a relatively short book (78 pages), Mayora included about six pages of direct quotes from an unnamed Guadalupe *colegiala*, whom he describes as “an Indian of whom I have entire satisfaction, for her constant virtue, judiciousness, maturity, and zeal with which she governs many of her nation, and tries to perfect herself.”<sup>89</sup> Given the reference to leadership, this woman was most likely a headmistress at the school – perhaps the first indigenous headmistress. Although most of her testimony served to praise the holiness of Herdoñona, her words also highlighted the initiative of indigenous women. For example, she described how indigenous women demanded Herdoñana’s attention as a confessor,

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<sup>88</sup> Mayora, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Mayora, 37.

strove to enter Corpus Christi, or had their own spiritual revelations under Herdoñana's mentorship. The "female gaze" of the unnamed witness's perspective brought attention to actions and perspectives that Mayora, as a Creole priest, would not have included otherwise. Her proximity to colonial authorities like Herdoñana and Mayora, in turn, gave this woman a platform to describe the holiness of her fellow indigenous women to a broader audience.

Evidence from this woman's testimony, coupled with other Guadalupe documents, demonstrate that the Guadalupe school facilitated connections among indigenous women. In Herdoñana's biography, the unnamed indigenous woman described how Herdoñana once encountered a pregnant woman, suffering from poverty, who had fallen down just outside of the Guadalupe school context. Herdoñana placed the pregnant woman in the home of one of his indigenous female parishioners. At this home, two indigenous women supported the pregnant woman and served as her midwives during the birth. Afterwards, the poverty-stricken woman seems to have remained in the San Gregorio/Guadalupe circle for several years: Mayora's informant said she knew of this event not only because she herself was there, but because the woman herself also told her the full story.<sup>90</sup> Members of the Guadalupe school, therefore, helped facilitate an indigenous woman's integration with indigenous communities within Mexico City. These connections between the school and the broader indigenous community often had a long-lasting impact. For example, one Guadalupe alumna made a donation to the school because her daughter had died, so she gave the inheritance that would have been set aside

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<sup>90</sup> Mayora, 39.

for her daughter to the school instead.<sup>91</sup> Coming full circle with the maternal style of governance envisioned with Herdoñana, it appears that the students also felt a familial connection with the school and other students, that allowed one woman to envision the school as a substitute for her daughter after her daughter's death. While Herdoñana had hoped his school would help indigenous women accept the paternal authority of the Crown and other colonial authorities, it also helped create and strengthen kinship bonds and ethnic solidarity between indigenous women.

The Guadalupe school was also part of a larger network of religious institutions dedicated to indigenous people throughout Mexico City. San Gregorio, the boys' school located next door, was not only a school, "but a large parish of exclusively Indian men and women."<sup>92</sup> Herdoñana spoke Nahuatl fluently: he both heard confessions in that language, and also preached in Nahuatl, with occasional digressions into Spanish for theological terms.<sup>93</sup> The indigenous people who attended San Gregorio defended it vigorously as a place that belonged to them alone. Herdoñana's biographer, fellow Jesuit Juan Mayora, explained that Spanish men and women were prohibited from coming to Herdoñana for confession.

[At San Gregorio, Herdoñana] did not hear confessions from Spanish men, and much less Spanish women, no matter how highly ranked they were, nor which authorities had authorized it, nor their servants, if they were not Indians, nor any other class of people, who were not of this Nation. Because if the Natives were to discover, that the Father did not attend to them exclusively...they would not return to his confessional. Thus they live so self-centeredly, that if any [Spanish] lady tries to approach, they block her path, and it has happened more than a few

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<sup>91</sup> Razon compendiosa del estado del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de Indias doncellas de esta corte, 17 May 1769, BNE, MS 3535.

<sup>92</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> Luisa Elena Alcalá analyzes one of these sermons in Luisa Elena Alcalá, "Blanqueando La Loreto Mexicana: Prejuicios Sociales y Condicionantes Materiales En La Representación de Vírgenes Negras.," in *La Imagen Religiosa En La Monarquía Hispánica: Usos y Espacios*, by María Cruz de Carlos Varona et al. (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2008), 182.

times, that [the Indian women] tell them, that these priests aren't here for Spanish women, and that there are other confessors elsewhere.<sup>94</sup>

Apparently, the Spanish population of Mexico City did not recognize San Gregorio as a place that was founded especially for indigenous people, at least not to the exclusion of Spaniards and Creoles. In contrast, the indigenous people there believed that San Gregorio belonged especially to them, and physically expelled any non-indigenous person who entered. Mayora noted that Herdoñana tolerated this situation because he believed it was important for the success of his ministry to the indigenous population. Notably, it was women in particular who defended San Gregorio's as their own space, perhaps because of its close connection with the Guadalupe school.

Connections with other indigenous groups stretched beyond the San Gregorio/Guadalupe complex. Mayora reported that indigenous people traveled long distances to attend San Gregorio, and the library there apparently contained books not only written in Nahuatl, but "other languages of the various nations of this province" as well.<sup>95</sup> Three Guadalupe students went on to become nuns in the Convent of Corpus Christi.<sup>96</sup> Even before the Guadalupe school opened, Herdoñana had supported the application of another indigenous woman from his parish at San Gregorio to enter Corpus Christi.<sup>97</sup> When Doña María Gertrudis Lardizábal y Uribe, a wealthy donor, and Father Pedro Rangel proposed a new school for indigenous girls in Tlatelolco, the viceroy requested that they submit a copy of the Guadalupe school rules, for comparison and to

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<sup>94</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 57.

<sup>95</sup> Mayora, 26; Royal Council Meeting, 28 November 1770, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Gobierno Virreinal/Real Junta/Volumen Único, 30.

<sup>96</sup> Ann Miriam Gallagher, R. S. M., "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 163.

<sup>97</sup> Mayora, *Relación de La Vida y Virtudes de P. Herdoñana*, 26.

see what type of rules had been accepted by the Crown.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, Pedro Rangel likely had connections to both San Gregorio and Guadalupe: José Rangel, who served as chaplain of both the San Gregorio and Guadalupe school, was probably his brother. The Guadalupe school, San Gregorio, Corpus Christi, and similar initiatives and institutions helped unify and strengthen indigenous relationship within Mexico City, and created a strong network that could receive indigenous migrants from outside of the city.

A battle over ownership of an image of Our Lady of Loreto helps make these types of connections clearer. The original image was supposedly painted by Saint Luke on the back of a table in the first century AD, and then miraculously transferred to Loreto, Italy. The Jesuit order had been placed in charge of the site in Italy, and so copies of the image of Our Lady of Loreto were particularly common in Jesuit-run institutions.<sup>99</sup> In 1680, the Jesuits built a chapel at San Gregorio dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto, which gained great popularity among the indigenous parishioners.<sup>100</sup> A celebration in honor of the Virgin was held every year, and she was credited for stopping a smallpox attack in 1727.<sup>101</sup>

After the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico by Royal Decree in 1767, however, the Conceptionist order took over operations at San Gregorio, closed the Loreto Chapel, and moved the statue to the Convent of the Incarnation in 1772. Not only was the Convent of the Incarnation a several-kilometer walk away from the indigenous neighborhood of San Sebastián, where San Gregorio and Guadalupe were located, but it

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<sup>98</sup> Informe al virrey, 26 March 1802, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0552.

<sup>99</sup> Alcalá, "Blanqueando La Loreto Mexicana," 174.

<sup>100</sup> Real Junta meeting, 6 July 1773, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Gobierno Virreinal/Real Junta/Volumen Único, 184v.

<sup>101</sup> Alcalá, "Blanqueando La Loreto Mexicana," 176.

was also much closer to the Spanish city-center of the main plaza, cathedral, and governmental offices. The viceroy supported this move because of concerns over crime in the indigenous neighborhood of San Sebastián, where both San Gregorio and Guadalupe were located.

In response, a number of indigenous groups filed petitions with the viceregal court to have the image returned to San Gregorio. The wide range of people represented in the petitions demonstrate the far-reaching connections that centered upon the San Gregorio/Guadalupe school complex. One petition was signed by students at San Gregorio, while two others came from the Creole representatives of the San Gregorio and Guadalupe school, respectively. Finally, two petitions were signed by indigenous governors of indigenous communities both within and outside of Mexico City borders, representing Popotla, San Antonio de las Huertas, San Juan, Santiago, the Villa of Tacuba, and Tlalnepantla.<sup>102</sup> The petitions asked that the image either be placed in the Convent of Corpus Christi, the only convent for indigenous women in the city, or else returned to San Gregorio. If it was returned, they promised to contribute with their money and labor to ensure that the church remained open and with all the proper trappings, and defending it against crime.

The viceroy, Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, believed that the indigenous groups were misinformed about the nature and duration of the move. He responded that he was “not surprised at the claims made by the petitions,” but that they were based in the “mistaken intelligence that the Sacred Statue will be transferred forever [to the convent of the Incarnation] or in the pointless fear (because they don’t know the circumstances of its

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<sup>102</sup> Real Junta meeting, 6 July 1773, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Gobierno Virreinal/Real Junta/Volumen Único, 184.

transfer) that the nuns will resist returning it.”<sup>103</sup> Although he promised that the image would be returned at some point in the future, he decided that for the time being, the statue should remain in its current location. As a way of assuaging the fears of the indigenous groups, he also instructed the nuns of Incarnation to make sure that the statue was always available to indigenous worshipers, “for the functions that they wished to celebrated in honor of the Most Sacred Virgin.”<sup>104</sup>

At some point in the next two decades, the image was returned to San Gregorio.<sup>105</sup> In the early 1790s, Ana Ventura Gómez, a Guadalupe school alumna, made multiple efforts to raise funds for the Loreto statue, which she described as “the powerful image of Our Lady of Loreto which is venerated at the School of San Gregorio.”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, Ventura identified herself as the “mayordoma” (head servant) of the image, indicating that there was a larger group of women who were collaborating to ensure that the image was properly cared for and celebrated. An 1812 inventory of the belongings of the San Gregorio school confirmed that the statue had, in fact, been returned at some point between 1773 and 1812.<sup>107</sup> The saga of the statue of Loreto demonstrates the ways that indigenous communities across and around Mexico City mobilized in defense of their practices, centering on the San Gregorio/Guadalupe complex as well as Corpus Christi.

Ana Ventura Gómez’s overall relationship with the Guadalupe school also demonstrates the ways that school empowered women and shaped their understanding of

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<sup>103</sup> Real Junta meeting, 6 July 1773, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Gobierno Virreinal/Real Junta/Volumen Único, 184.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> William B. Taylor, *Theater of a Thousand Wonders: A History of Miraculous Images and Shrines in New Spain* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 271.

<sup>106</sup> Ana Ventura Gómez sobre se le concede licencia de colectar limosna, 22 December 1790, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales, Clero Regular y Secular, Voluemn 22, Expediente 15, 33514/15/ Expediente 15.

<sup>107</sup> Inventario de Bienes del Colegio San Gregorio, 2 May 1812, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

ethnic allegiance. Ventura was from a high-ranking indigenous family and was possibly a *cacica* (indigenous noblewoman), with longstanding connections to the indigenous communities most closely linked with Catholicism. Most likely, she had a relative who was a nun at Corpus Christi. In 1784, a *cacica* named “Anna Ventura” solicited a grant from the San Gregorio confraternity on behalf of her orphaned niece who had been accepted as a nun in Corpus Christi.<sup>108</sup> This woman was most likely Ventura Gómez: if Ventura herself had entered the school in the early 1750s as a young schoolgirl, which she claimed, it is entirely possible that she would have a niece in her early twenties by the mid-1780s. Ventura herself lived at the school for over thirty years, only leaving in the late 1780s.

In 1790, Ventura filed a letter of complaint with the viceregal government, alleging that the Guadalupe school had enrolled a Spanish girl. She requested that this girl be expelled from the school. Although hers is the only signature on the letter, Ventura presented herself as representing a group of the original students enrolled at Guadalupe, all of whom were “*cacicas* and *principal* Indians.” Once again, San Gregorio appeared in connection with the school, as Ventura explained that her group of female students was writing in “*conjuntas personas*” with San Gregorio – a legal phrase that was typically used to refer to married couples. Ventura described herself as a founding member of the school. She testified that in thirty-six years of the school’s operation, no student had been admitted who was not “verified to be a pure Indian.” Admitting a non-indigenous student, she argued, would be against the school constitutions and the desires of the school’s founders. If the student was enrolled simply because she could pay for her

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<sup>108</sup> Schmidt Diaz de Leon, *Colegio Seminario De Indios De San Gregorio*, 49.

education and the school was in need of financial support, Ventura continued, she and the other petitioners would commit to work for greater donations to the school. Either way, she concluded, the Spanish girl must be expelled, or else “great and painful harm would come to the school.”<sup>109</sup> Ventura’s letter was simply copied into the governmental record – a standard procedure – and is undated, so we don’t know how quickly the viceroy responded, but we do know that by late April of 1790 he responded by requesting more information from the Guadalupe rector, Don Joseph Rangel.

Rangel wrote back to the viceroy the very next day, declaring that Ventura was completely mistaken and that only indigenous students had ever been admitted to the school in the sixteen years that he had served as rector. A few days later, however, he wrote again with the full story. It turns out that Ventura was partially correct: a five-year-old Spanish girl had stayed at the school for several days. This girl had travelled with her widowed mother from Xalapa to Mexico City, where her mother had fallen ill. The two of them came under the care of an unnamed male Guadalupe school benefactor, who placed the mother in a hospital, and asked the headmistress, María Elviro, to care for the young girl, since it would be inappropriate for her to remain in the home of an unmarried man. Apparently, Rangel approved this measure under the impression that the girl was indigenous; when Elviro discovered her Spanish ancestry, she decided to keep her at the school anyway, “moved by compassion.”<sup>110</sup> The mother had recovered within a few days, according to Rangel, and had already come to fetch her daughter. Rangel assured the

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<sup>109</sup> Ana Ventura Gómez, letter to the viceregal court, no date, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 1311/6390/28, Exp 28, Case of Ana Ventura Gómez.

<sup>110</sup> Joseph Rangel, letter to the viceregal court, 30 April 1790, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 1311/6390/28, Exp 28, Case of Ana Ventura Gómez.

viceroy that this was the only case of a non-indigenous student ever entering Guadalupe, and that he had made his earlier report with every intention of telling the truth.

Luckily for Rangel and Elviro, the viceroy had no desire to punish them for failing to include the whole story in the first report, or for allowing the girl to stay for a few days. He attempted to close the case by sending a scribe to Guadalupe to inform Rangel, Elviro, and Ventura that he considered the situation to be resolved to his satisfaction. However, it was Elviro, the indigenous headmistress, who would have the last word. The viceroy had sent the scribe to Guadalupe to notify all the involved parties, under the assumption that Ventura was a current *colegiala*; but Elviro reported that Ventura had recently decided to leave the school. Regardless, the scribe fulfilled his official duties to notify Elviro, at least, calling her into the school's locutorio and reading out loud to her Ventura's letter, the viceroy's decree to investigate, and Rangel's two responses.

Hearing all the details of Ventura's complaint spurred Elviro to write a rebuttal of her own, defending her decision and attacking Ventura. The Guadalupe school, she argued, had always served poor children of any race who came to the school as external pupils, and attended classes for half the day before returning home with their parents. Given the extreme need of the Spanish girl, Elviro argued, she did not feel that "such a work of great charity to a female creature" was in any way opposed to the rules and constitutions of the school. She herself, she continued, was a staunch defender of the rights of the school to admit only pure Indians as *colegialas* to live full-time at the school, and indeed had turned Spanish women away who had tried to gain admittance. Finally, she claimed that Ventura had recently left the school of her own desire, but she

had come to regret her decision to leave, and had decided to try to discredit it out of jealousy. She concluded her rejection of Ventura's complaints with a request of her own: that the viceroy tell Ventura to stop making up rumors about the school.<sup>111</sup> Elviro's letter was the last document contained in the government's records, so most likely the viceroy just let things lie.

Two things stand out about this case. The first is that both Ana Ventura Gómez and María Elviro had confidence in their ability to influence the viceregal government, a belief that turned out to be well-founded. In different ways, each woman defended her own view of what the school was supposed to be, and the male leaders – the viceroy and the rector, as well as the scribe – played a secondary part in the whole affair, simply responding to the indigenous women's accusations, defenses, and requests. Secondly, the case speaks to the connections that belonging to Guadalupe established. While Ventura was either misinformed or intentionally misrepresenting the situation, she must have encountered the kernel of truth from somewhere, since she herself no longer lived at the school. Perhaps she spoke with the relatives of current students or stopped by the school itself to pray in the chapel or purchase some chocolates and had learned of the Spanish student in that way. No matter how Ventura discovered the information, her knowledge of what was happening inside the school walls indicates that Guadalupe students were well-connected with the larger indigenous community.

## **Conclusion**

The Guadalupe school was intended to form young indigenous women into exceptional Catholics, free from the supposedly sinful tendencies of their indigenous

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<sup>111</sup> Report of the scribe, 8 May 1790, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 1311/6390/28, Exp 28, Case of Ana Ventura Gómez.

ancestors and family members. In order to achieve this goal, the school mandated a strict schedule of work and prayer, and controlled the smallest details of the students' experiences, down to the ribbons they could wear in their hair. Herdoñana strove to replace students' connections with their families of origin with a kinship-like relationship to the headmistress, hoping that this maternal affection would make discipline at the school easier. Moreover, the school relied on students' unpaid labor to maintain financial stability. In short, the school's goals were primarily those of colonialism, writ large: cultural genocide, labor exploitation, and the imposition of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the school also allowed indigenous women to enact their agency in new arenas. Through their position as headmistresses, indigenous women became leaders within the school and increased their influence with colonial leaders, from priests to bishops to viceroys. Guadalupe school students and alumnae mobilized in support of indigenous people, places, and celebrations, and facilitated connections between indigenous institutions like San Gregorio and Corpus Christi. Women like Ana Ventura Gómez and María Elviro vigorously defended their understanding of the Guadalupe's school's institutional identity – and confidently expressed their perspectives to colonial authorities to inspire action. The Guadalupe school may have been intended to remove indigenous girls from their cultural and familial heritage, but it also gave them tools that they wielded in defense of their nation.

## **Chapter 2: “Most Hearty Thanks for the Education of My Daughter”: Indigenous Identity at Moor’s Indian Charity School, 1761-1769**

Mary Secuter (Narragansett), it turned out, did not want to marry Hezekiah Calvin (Delaware). The two of them had met while students at Moor’s Indian Charity School in Lebanon Crank, Connecticut, where Calvin was being trained as a missionary to outlying tribes while Secuter was being prepared to serve as a missionary’s wife. In addition to his initial posting as a schoolteacher and missionary’s assistant in Iroquois tribes in upstate New York, Calvin dedicated himself to searching for an appropriate wife, and had his heart set on Secuter. Eleazar Wheelock, the founder of Moor’s, would have been happy to see another match made between two of his students – it would have been confirmation that his “Great Design” for the conversion of all New England tribes was working. Nevertheless, Secuter resisted. The years of formation at Moor’s school, where she received lessons steeped in patriarchy and emphasizing the need for obedience and submission to male authority, apparently were not enough to convince her to acquiesce to Wheelock’s desires and marry an indigenous missionary.

Secuter’s actions help reveal the force, scope, and limits of the educational practices at Moor’s Indian Charity School (1754 – 1769). Founded by a Congregationalist minister, the school enrolled about fifteen girls and eighty boys during its existence, primarily from coastal New England tribes (Mohegan, Narragansett, and Pequot, among others) as well as a few from farther afield: Delaware, also known as Lenapes from the New Jersey region, and Iroquois from western New York. At the “female” branch of the school, which was open from 1761-1769, Wheelock implemented a curriculum that focused primarily on domestic skills and Christian values, as well as basic literacy. He embraced a paternal style of governance that allowed him to control

nearly every aspect of students' lives, from their daily schedule, to their clothes, to their demonstration of affect. The female students, however, developed strategies for navigating and ameliorating the impact of Wheelock's paternal governance, allowing them to enact their own agency and transform Moor's Indian Charity School into a site of pan-Indian activism and resistance.

### **Indigenous Education in North America**

As in Mexico, indigenous girls' education in the pre-Columbian era primarily took place at home, with mothers passing down knowledge about agriculture, medicine, and food preparation to their daughters. Among the Algonquian-speakers of New England, basket-weaving was an important female skill, including knowledge of the signs and symbols woven into the sides of the basket. Although weaving and embroidery did not constitute a written language, these symbols that women incorporated into their crafts did rely upon a communicative strategy that relied upon a permanent physical record; in fact, the average indigenous girl might have been able to draw upon a larger bank of meaningful symbols than an average indigenous boy, making girls in some respects more literate than boys.

British missionaries arriving in North America sought to impart English-language literacy skills to indigenous people – particularly because of the high importance they placed on being able to read the Bible. Initial enthusiasm, spurred on particularly by a need to compete with the French and Spanish, even produced a curriculum guide for indigenous students in Virginia. In 1621, Rev. John Brinsley, a preacher from Leicestershire, England, wrote *A Consolation for Our Grammar Schools*, which outlined the types of books and instruction that Brinsley, who never traveled to America, thought

might be successful in the New World.<sup>1</sup> A proposed college for indigenous students in Virginia, however, never really materialized. The initiative was first conceptualized during famed Powhatan woman Pocahontas' first trip to London in 1617. By 1620, the project's proponents had collected a substantial amount of donations for the school, which was to be called Henrico College. It would be appended onto a larger institution, named Henrico University, where students of white settlers would receive a university-level education.<sup>2</sup> After the eruption of violence between English settlers and Powhatan Indians in 1622, however – the second of what would be three attempts by the Powhatans to push the English off their lands – support for the project quickly faded. Later on, other universities, such as Harvard College in Massachusetts, the College of William and Mary in Virginia, and Princeton College in New Jersey, would state that they were founded partly in order to educate indigenous males, but rarely accepted more than a handful of students throughout the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>3</sup>

Instead, English settlers generally focused on more informal methods of instruction, such as taking indigenous children into their homes.<sup>4</sup> This approach, however, often blurred the lines between education, apprenticeship, and indentured servitude or slavery, depending on the attitudes of the homeowner, and whether or not the

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<sup>1</sup> James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 181.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Connell Szasz, *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607-1783*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 60–62.

<sup>3</sup> Szasz, 69; Cary Michael Carney, “An Historical Analysis of Native American Higher Education Institutions in the United States” (Ed.D. dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1998); Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013); Camilla Townsend et al, “‘I Am Old and Weak ... and You Are Young and Strong ...’: The Intersecting Histories of Rutgers University and the Lenni Lenape,” in *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*, by Marisa J. Fuentes and Deborah Gray White, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 6–42.

<sup>4</sup> Szasz, 64.

indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families of origin. While statistics on this type of education are scanty, laws passed in Virginia in the 1650s tried to remind colonists of their duty to “release” the children that they had supposedly taken in for educational purposes by the age of 25, indicating that many were simply keeping the children and young adults for labor purposes. In Massachusetts, similar initiatives also floundered because of the spread of disease among the indigenous children living with English families for the first time.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, English missionaries in New England turned to another method: establishing primary schools in “praying towns,” where they congregated indigenous people who had already accepted Christianity to a certain level. Between 1650 and 1665, missionaries had established at least thirteen such schools.<sup>6</sup> These smaller schools may have been more popular among girls than boys. When the trend of establishing primary schools moved into Connecticut in the eighteenth century, it was sometimes at the request of indigenous communities, who by that point “saw literacy as a powerful tool of survival in their increasingly anglicized world.”<sup>7</sup> Algonquian gender norms, coupled with the need for indigenous boys to travel farther afield to earn money, meant that more girls were available to participate in these schools.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, missionary societies continued to send male schoolmasters, although they also occasionally deputized indigenous men to serve as teachers. A proposed boarding school for Mahican girls in Stockbridge, Massachusetts never fully materialized.<sup>9</sup> Christian

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<sup>5</sup> Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 182–83.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>8</sup> Hilary E Wyss, “Writing Back to Wheelock: One Young Woman’s Response to Colonial Christianity,” in *Early Native Literacies in New England*, by Hilary E Wyss and Kristina Bross (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>9</sup> Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 200.

education in New England specifically focused on indigenous girls would not become a reality until 1761.

### **Moor's Indian Charity School**

Like the Guadalupe school, the female branch of Moor's Indian Charity School developed after its founder had been immersed in the world of indigenous boys' education for a number of years. After his ordination as a Congregationalist minister in 1735, Eleazar Wheelock supplemented his minister's salary by tutoring Anglo-American boys in preparation for college. In the early 1740s, Sarah Occom, a Mohegan and convert to Christianity, contacted Wheelock and asked him to provide a similar course of study for her son, Samson. Samson ended up living with Wheelock for nearly four years; although failing eyesight prevented him from advancing further in his education, Wheelock considered Occom's formation to be a great success. This experience inspired Wheelock to craft a "Great Design" for the conversion and salvation of native peoples up and down the eastern seaboard: he would open a school for indigenous boys, who would then be trained to become missionaries to their own tribes as well as more distant ones – inculcating along the way, of course, the "civilized" English method of living. In 1754, he opened Moor's Charity School with two students from the Delaware tribe.

A few years later, Wheelock decided he needed to expand his school to include female students, in order to better achieve his goal of mass conversion. In a pamphlet sent to school donors and missionary organizations, he explained the opening of a Female School was a "matter of absolute necessity" because there could not be "a propagation of

religion among any people, without an equal regard to both sexes.”<sup>10</sup> Specifically, according to Wheelock, indigenous women’s role in the spread of Christianity lay primarily in their role as mothers, “because the care for souls of children in families, especially those of low degree, lies chiefly upon the Mothers.” The education indigenous girls would receive at Moor’s, therefore, would not be for their own benefit, but “for the sake of their posterity.”<sup>11</sup> Education of indigenous girls, according to Wheelock, was simply a means to an end.

Additionally, Wheelock hoped that the female graduates of his school would marry the indigenous men who he was training to be missionaries. In a 1761 letter to a donor, he seemed anxious about the permanence of his Anglicization of the Indian missionary students, and looked to the Indian girls to shore up his Great Design. He wrote that the missionaries would need Christian wives “for the purpose that *these* Boy[s] may not be under absolute *necessity* to turn savage in this manner of living for want of those who can do the female part of them when they shall be abroad on the business of their Missions and out of the reach of the English.”<sup>12</sup> While Wheelock doubted the Indian men’s fidelity to their conversion once they are far “out of the reach of the English,” he apparently harbored no such fears about the women, whom he assumed would remain steadfast in their commitment to Christian civilizing project. In Wheelock’s vision, Indian women, trained in the domestic skills of Anglo culture and steeped in Christian theology, would be an example not only to their children, but also their husbands.

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<sup>10</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and Present State of the Indian Charity-School at Lebanon, in Connecticut*. (Boston: Richard and Samuel Draper, 1763), 35, <http://opac.newsbank.com/select/evans/9537>.

<sup>11</sup> Wheelock, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Andrew Oliver, 15 October 1760, quoted in Szasz, 223.

Moreover, as missionary wives, they would help promote the Christianization and Anglicization of indigenous tribes across North America.

In June of 1761, Wheelock officially opened his “Female School.” The first student was Amy Johnson, a Mohegan and the sister of a boy enrolled in the school, Joseph Johnson. Over the next few years, approximately sixteen girls, about one-fourth of the overall student body, would study at the school. The majority of the female students who attended Moor’s School were either Narragansets or Mohegans, probably due to the fact that both of those tribes had a high number of members who were involved with Christianity, as well as their relative geographical proximity to Moor’s, about fifty miles.<sup>13</sup> At least three also had brothers enrolled in the school. An adult female, listed as student at Moor’s, was also the wife of a male student, Narraganset Toby Shattock, who attended for just a few months to bolster his writing skills. Miriam Storrs, a Delaware student, was sent from New Jersey to attend the school, while Susannah, Katharine, Mary, and Margaret (Mohawks), and Hannah (Oneida) would have come from upstate New York. The rest grew up along the coast of Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Of all the female students, we only have additional information about a few of them. Miriam Storrs, a Delaware, was the second girl to enter the school, arriving around September 1761. She came from a Christian Indian family that had worked closely with the missionary John Brainerd in New Jersey, the same community that had sent three other male students to Moor’s.<sup>14</sup> In a letter describing Miriam to Wheelock, Brainerd

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Charlestown, a Narragansett village, had four churches: an Anglican church founded in 1721, a Congregationalist church founded in 1734, a Separatist Indian Church founded by Narraganset Samuel Niles, and a Home Church, which split off from Niles’ church in 1753. For more on Christian Indians in New England, see James Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially chapters 1, 2, and 3.

<sup>14</sup> Townsend and et al, “‘I Am Old and Weak ... and You Are Young and Strong ...’: The Intersecting Histories of Rutgers University and the Lenni Lenape,” 21.

wrote that he had “much reason to think she was savingly converted when she was about three years old,” a process which he had been, “with pleasure and satisfaction...an eyewitness.”<sup>15</sup> Not to be outdone, Wheelock also reported that Miriam’s conversion had been confirmed while she was a student at his school. Under his tutelage, he explained, she had “had such discoveries of the truth, reality, and greatness of things revealed” that she “fainted under them.”<sup>16</sup> Miriam left the school sometime in late 1768, seemingly under amicable terms. (She had spent over seven years at the school and turned eighteen in the year that she left, so she might have simply aged out.) Upon her return to her hometown, she worked as a housemaid; Brainerd reported to Wheelock that he wanted to apprentice her to a seamstress but was unable to find anyone willing to take her on. By 1772, the last time she was mentioned by Brainerd, she was still unmarried.<sup>17</sup>

Hannah Garrett (Pequot/Brothertown) and Mary Secuter (Narraganset) entered the school on the same day in December, 1763, but their experiences there had very different outcomes. Garrett was the only student who married another Moor’s alumnus, David Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown).<sup>18</sup> By the time of their marriage, Fowler was in his late twenties and had courted two other students at Moor’s before choosing Garrett; she had entered the school at age sixteen and was nineteen years old when they were married. Afterwards, they left Connecticut to return to Fowler’s missionary post in upstate New York. Less than a month later, Hannah became pregnant with a son who would go on to

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<sup>15</sup> John Brainerd to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 September 1761, in Thomas Brainerd, *The Life of John Brainerd, the Brother of David Brainerd, and His Successor as Missionary to the Indians of New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, ADF Randolph, 1865), 332.

<sup>16</sup> Eleazar Wheelock to Andrew Gifford, 24 February 1763, in James Dow McCallum, *The Letters of Eleazar Wheelock’s Indians* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Publications, 1932), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Brainerd, *The Life of John Brainerd*, 383, 396.

<sup>18</sup> I follow the preference of the Brothertown Nation and identify early members of Brothertown by their original tribe followed by Brothertown, as in David Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown).

become one of the leaders of the Brothertown community.<sup>19</sup> Mary Secuter, often known as Molly, described the school as her home after living there for two years, writing that she preferred to “return home” to the school rather than extend her visit to her hometown of Charlestown, Rhode Island in the fall of 1767.<sup>20</sup> After those initial calm years, however, her time at the school became more tumultuous. Over the winter of 1768, she was punished at least twice for drunkenness and lewd behavior, and in late July or early August of that year she withdrew from the school, claiming that she “had been more trouble to the doctor [Wheelock] than all my mates,” and that she “should be glad to leave the school next week and be no longer a member of it.”<sup>21</sup> A few months later, she was living in Charleston and still in contact with Wheelock. While her younger brother, also a student, completed his time at the school and, a few decades later, moved to the new Brothertown settlement, it is unclear what happened to Secuter herself after 1768.

The fourth female student whose time at the school was well-documented is Sarah Simon. A Narraganset, she came to the school in 1765 as second of five children from her family who would attend the school. The rest were all brothers: Emanuel joined the school before her, in 1763, while younger brothers James began in 1767, followed by Abraham and Daniel in 1768. While Sarah’s exact birthdate is unknown, her older brother was born in 1746 and a younger brother in 1750, so Sarah was probably in her late teenage years when she was at Moor’s. Her mother, also named Sarah, had been widowed around 1760, and was known as one of the “most faithful Christian Indians”

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<sup>19</sup> McCallum, *The Letters of Eleazar Wheelock’s Indians*, 293–97.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 12 October 1767, Dartmouth College Archives [hereafter DCA], Wheelock Papers [hereafter WP], 767562.2

<sup>21</sup> Mary Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 28 July 1768, DCA WP, 768428.2.

among the Narraganset.<sup>22</sup> Sarah, the daughter, enjoyed reading and initially told her mother that she was happy at the school. Nevertheless, letters from 1768 and 1769 show increasing homesickness and a desire to return to Charlestown. At some point in 1769, she seems to have resolved to leave the school as well; her name disappeared from Wheelock's account books in 1769, but in January of 1770 he noted paying for a horse to bring Sarah Simons to Charlestown.<sup>23</sup> Finally, another student, Mohegan Sarah Wyacks, only attended Moor's for a few months, but wrote a letter afterwards in which she mentioned her time at the school.

### **Rules and Regulations at Moor's**

Wheelock exerted control over nearly every aspect of the students' lives. As the primary authority figure of the school, assisted in the later years by a few additional teachers, Wheelock set the daily schedule, selected students' clothing, and assigned students chores. For the Female School, Wheelock's decisions were informed by two primary goals. First, as mentioned above, he sought to mold his students into ideal future wives and mothers. This entailed instruction in both domestic work (cooking, sewing, and cleaning) as well as basic literacy skills. In Wheelock's mind, this goal required separation of the indigenous girls from the purportedly negative influence of their families, which would allow him to reshape the indigenous girls' knowledge and perspectives to conform to Anglo gender roles. His second goal, although not always mentioned explicitly in external correspondence, was to make the Female School financially self-sustaining and even profitable. Through the female students' work, Wheelock hoped to save money on

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<sup>22</sup> William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1899), 360.

<sup>23</sup> Hilary E. Wyss, "Mary Occom and Sarah Simon: Gender and Native Literacy in Colonial New England," *The New England Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 409.

the cost of their room and board and counterbalance the expense of educating male students. In contrast to the male students, therefore, whose stay at the school was oriented towards future productivity, the female students faced the dual burdens of current and future expectations. As we will see later, however, navigating these tensions allowed female students to open up unexpected spaces for negotiation with Wheelock.

For the majority of the students coming from coastal tribes, the school's geography represented a massive change in their surroundings. Moor's School was located in a small Anglo settlement in the quaintly-named Lebanon Crank (crank being an old English term for a bend in a river or road), nestled in a heavily wooded area dotted with small lakes. Wheelock's institutions dominated the village center: his home, a two-story grey clapboard building with a large attic, stood across the village green from the Congregational Church where he preached. The school building stood almost exactly between of the church and the house, essentially in the backyard of both. Most of the boys lived in Wheelock's home, and would have walked about fifty yards to class every morning. The girls, who lived with families in the surrounding area, only attended classes one day per week, and in at least one case had to walk a few miles to get to Moor's.<sup>24</sup> The girls might have never even entered the school building; when Wheelock describes the girls' education, he simply says they are "attending the school at my house."<sup>25</sup> It is unclear whether he means the school building next to his house, or if classes for girls were actually held in Wheelock's home.

School days for the boys began daily at five o'clock in the morning, with prayers and communal reading of scripture in the schoolhouse, followed by other lessons. The girls followed a much different plan for their education. Wheelock's plan was for the girls to

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<sup>24</sup> See John Smith, letter to a friend, 18 May 1764, in McCallum, *Letters*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to William Johnson, 11 December 1761, DCA WP 761661.

receive education in “all parts of good housewifery [and]...instruction in writing, etc.,” as taught by Christian women in the area.<sup>26</sup> Six days of the week, the girls lived and worked with white families in the Lebanon Crank settlement, learning appropriate domestic skills for Anglo households. Once a week, they gathered for instruction in reading and writing, and then were assigned four lines of writing to copy at home each day. At this time, reading was considered the most important literacy skill for women.<sup>27</sup> At Moor’s, however, writing was also a necessary skill for girls who were being prepared to be wives to missionaries in far-off regions; the ability to write compelling letters to potential donors could mean the difference between poverty and comfort. From archival evidence, we know that at least four of the students were advanced enough to be able to write lengthy letters to Wheelock, and a fifth student was able to sign her name. For the rest, any writing they may have produced was not preserved, but most likely they all made at least some advances in literacy. Wheelock himself must have taught these classes until 1766, when he hired Elizabeth Huntington to work as both a “tailoress” and “instructress” at the school. The majority of the girls’ instruction, however, was informal, and similar to an apprenticeship or indenture.

The labor that female students performed as part of their education was also an essential source of funding for Moor’s Indian Charity school. Just like the Guadalupe school, the financial situation at Moor’s was always precarious, and Wheelock seemed to believe that the work of the female students could help balance the school’s budget. A letter from 1761 in the first year of the Female School, clearly outlined Wheelock’s thought

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<sup>26</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to William Johnson, 11 December 1761, DCA WP 761661.

<sup>27</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, “The Uses of Literacy by Girls in Colonial America,” in *Girls and Literacy in America: Historical Perspectives to the Present*, Jane Greer, ed. (Oxford: ABC Clio, 2003), 2, 3.

process. The city of Boston had promised to donate 12 pounds per student per year to the school, but as Wheelock explained to William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, this was not sufficient. “Twelve Pounds per Annum for each,” he wrote, “...as times are this day, will not support them.”<sup>28</sup> According to Wheelock’s ledgers, the typical expense for boarding, feeding, and educating one male student was around 5 shillings a week, which added up to about 13 pounds a year, not including periodic expenses for clothing, shoes, and books.<sup>29</sup> In his letter to Johnson, immediately following the line about the lack of funding for the male school, he continued, “And perhaps it will be expedient to take some Females from your Quarter, to be joined with two which I now have.”<sup>30</sup> Maintaining the Female School cost less than the equivalent expenses for the boys. In Wheelock’s 1769 accounts, the difference was drastic: in a six-month period, Wheelock spent 171 pounds total for fourteen male students, and only 32 pounds for eight Indian girls. On average, that meant that costs for a male student averaged around 12 pounds, while charges for a female student only equaled four pounds.<sup>31</sup>

Part of the reason that the Female School appeared to cost less, however, was because the system of working to pay tuition, which was applied sporadically to indigenous male students, was a more systematic procedure for the girls. In one of his yearly reports, Wheelock stated explicitly that “Making and mending cloths, etc., for the Male School, has

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<sup>28</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to William Johnson, 11 December 1761, DCA WP 761661.

<sup>29</sup> Wheelock also needed funds to support the missionaries he sent out; in 1769, the cost of tuition, boarding and supplies for the thirty enrolled students of the school was just over 280 pounds, while nearly 200 pounds went toward supporting five missionaries. See Eleazar Wheelock *A continuation of the narrative of the Indian charity-school, in Lebanon, in Connecticut: from the year 1768, to the incorporation of it with Dartmouth-College, and removal and settlement of it in Hanover, in the province of New-Hampshire, 1771* (Hartford, CT: Ebenezer Wheelock, 1771), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to William Johnson, 11 December 1761, DCA WP 761661.

<sup>31</sup> Within a year, there would be only two girls left at the school, and by the end of 1769 they had also left. The eight female students may not have stayed at the school during the entire six-month period covered in those charges. See *Narrative*, 1771, 44, 46.

been done by the Female School, which will near counter-balance the expense for support of it.”<sup>32</sup> For example, the 1768 Female School accounts were full of notations indicating payment for sewing done by the female students for Wheelock’s family, some of the male teachers at the school, and the white male students.<sup>33</sup> In the case of the male students and teachers, it seems likely that they paid Wheelock for their garments, and then he applied the profit directly to the Female School’s accounts. (Entries for fabric and sewing materials were also a frequent charge for the Female School.) Moreover, the girls’ work went toward the cost of their boarding. For example, in 1768 David Huntington was paid for boarding seven Indian girls, minus the work that they had done for him.<sup>34</sup>

Profit from female students’ work, however, was not entirely a one-directional flow from indigenous students to white authorities: the girls may have also received some pay for their work. In one case in 1767, a woman named Mrs. West was paid in the same way as David Huntington for boarding Miriam Storrs (paid for the cost of her board minus the work Storrs had done), but Wheelock noted that this calculation did not include “5 weeks [Storrs] had worked for herself.”<sup>35</sup> Despite Wheelock’s meticulous notes, it is difficult to confirm whether this money went to Miriam directly, or to cover her expenses at the school. Nevertheless, many of the girls who left the school were given a pound or two upon their departure, probably to pay for travel expenses – perhaps out of the profits of their handiwork. The financial situation, and the importance of the Indian girls’ work for the support of the school, was further complicated by the fact that white women worked for the school as well. In 1765, Wheelock paid his own daughters for sewing various shirts and

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<sup>32</sup> *Narrative*, 1771, 44 and also 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ledger Charity School New Accounts Daybook and Ledger*, 1767 – 79. DCA 403 (5399).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

jackets for the male Indian scholars, as well as “a hat for Mary Sequettass [Secuter]” and general mending.<sup>36</sup> A woman named Mrs. Smith made two gowns for Susannah Mohawk in late 1767. Lurviah Sprague and Elizabeth Huntington were both paid for instructing the girls as well as sewing various items for the school.<sup>37</sup>

Even if working for the school was a task undertaken by both whites and Indians, questions over the appropriate ratio of education to work often led to disagreements. Two male Indian students complained that they spent too much time working on Wheelock’s farm rather than studying. Sarah Simon’s brother, Daniel, wrote to Wheelock arguing that “if we poor Indians shall work as much as to pay for our learning, we can go some other place as good as here for learning.” He concluded with a threat: “If the doctor [Wheelock] doesn’t let me follow my studies more than I have done, I must leave the school.”<sup>38</sup> In the end, Daniel remained in the school, but another student, John Daniel, withdrew in 1767 due to the same complaints. His father explained his reasoning to Wheelock, in a letter transcribed by William Deake, the missionary at Charlestown: “Not that I’m anything against his laboring some for you, when business lies heavy on you: but to work two years to learn to farm, is what I don’t consent to, when I can as well teach him that myself.”<sup>39</sup> As is all too common, the girls at the school left no direct textual record of their feelings about the work, but missionary William Deake reported a rumor to Wheelock that had been circulating in Sarah Simon and Mary Secuter’s hometown of Charlestown. Hezekiah Calvin, a former student who was apparently in Charlestown in the summer of 1768, was telling everyone that “Mary Secuter and Sarah Simon have been kept as close to work, as

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<sup>36</sup> “Indian Charity School Daybook No. 2” 1765-67, DCA 403 (5399)

<sup>37</sup> Ledger with Index “Ledger 2” 1769-1771, DCA 403 (5399)

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Simon, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, September 1771, in McCallum, *Letters*, 221.

<sup>39</sup> John Daniel, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 30 November 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 231.

if they were your slaves, and have had no privilege in the school since last fall, nor one copper allowed them for their labor.”<sup>40</sup> Clearly Calvin, at least, believed that female students at Moor’s were spending too much time working.

As the Female School began its decline in the late 1760s, the line between servant and student became even more blurred. Nathan Clap, a Cape Cod Indian at the school, wrote to Wheelock informing him that he sought to marry “Miss Mary your maid.”<sup>41</sup> There were only two women named Mary who were recorded as being present at Wheelock’s school during that time: Wheelock’s daughter Mary, who would have been twenty years old and unmarried at the time, and the Narragansett Mary Secuter. It seems highly improbable that Clap would have dared to propose an interracial marriage to Wheelock, so Clap must have been referring to Mary Secuter, and described her as Wheelock’s servant rather than a fellow student. Wheelock’s ledgers also conflate the identity of the female Indian students and the female labor force at the school. According to his account books, in September 1768 he made a payment to David Huntington for boarding the “Indian Girls for 72 weeks.” (Given that twenty weeks had passed since the last payment, this probably means about three or four girls boarded there over the summer.) The next May, Huntington only boarded two girls: Sarah Simon, and Hannah Nonesuch, as well as the instructor Lurviah Sprague, all of whom were identified by name in the record books. By the November 1769 payment, Wheelock notes that Huntington was being paid for boarding Sprague for 25 weeks, “hired girls” for 13 weeks, and a “washer” for one week. The “Indian girls” had disappeared from the records and been replaced by hired help.<sup>42</sup> Although there

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<sup>40</sup> Edward Deake, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 21 June 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Nathan Clap, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 28 June 1778, in McCallum, *Letters*, 68.

<sup>42</sup> *Charity School New Accounts Daybook and Ledger, 1767 – 79* DCA 403 (5399)

were no female students enrolled at the school by late 1769, Wheelock's records were ambiguous: were the indigenous girls replaced by paid staff, or did the "Indian girls" become the "hired girls"?

Wheelock continued to be involved with managing indigenous girls' workload even after he closed the Female School and moved Moor's to New Hampshire. A letter from a Lebanon Crank farmer, Aaron Bruce, indicated that Wheelock had placed at least two girls with Connecticut families for domestic training shortly before moving away. That farmer, Aaron Bruce, wrote to Wheelock in 1774 with an update on the girls: "Sir, hoping these lines may put you in remembrance of the two Indian girls that you put to my house to learn trades. Sir, they stayed with me so short time that I think I ought to have some allowances sir, one stayed nine months and the other eleven."<sup>43</sup> It seems that Bruce viewed the girls as indentured servants, who would receive the benefit of instruction in agriculture in exchange for their labor – and if this contract were broken, Bruce would be owed a recompense for the lost labor. The unnamed indigenous girls' experience provides additional support for the theory that the "Indian girls" still enrolled at Moor's school in early 1769 simply became indentured workers.

In addition to controlling female students' daily lives and labor, Wheelock also decided when and how the girls returned home to visit their families. Unlike the Guadalupe school, Moor's was located further away from the indigenous students' home communities, so school policies did not have to address visits from family members on a regular basis. Students were, however, dependent on Wheelock's support to travel home: they needed money, the use of his horses, and often a travel pass in order to make it

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<sup>43</sup> Aaron Bruce, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 15 August 1774, DCA WP 74465.

safely to their destinations. For example, when an Oneida student named Hannah traveled back from Connecticut to upstate New York with her brother William, Wheelock wrote a note that they could show to explain the purpose of their journey.<sup>44</sup> Indigenous people traveling without such passes could find themselves being apprehended and accused of being runaway slaves or enemy combatants by local white settlers.

Wheelock did not always grant permission for students to go home. Sarah Simon made multiple requests for permission to travel home, once in the spring of 1768 and again a year later. Both times, she wrote Wheelock a letter to explain her position, probably using the written word to communicate in order to increase the formality and possible persuasiveness of her request. The first time, she explained that she was feeling unwell and wanted to travel home to the seashore. Wheelock, however, did not let her go, explaining in a letter to her mother that he “thought it not best she should come home to visit you till the fall.”<sup>45</sup> It is unclear if Simon ever made it home that fall, but the next spring, she again requested permission to travel home, this time to visit her ailing mother. In this letter, Simon carefully built a case that would compel Wheelock to give her permission. “I desire...to go and see [my mother] as often as the Doctor is willing...but I feel willing to do anything Sir that you think is best for me,” she explained. “...Seems to me I could go anywhere or do any thing if it would do any good to my poor Perishing Brethren.”<sup>46</sup> Echoing directly Wheelock’s description of perishing Indians, Sarah portrayed this visit home as part of his larger mission, and emphasized her submission to Wheelock as a way of reassuring him that she did not desire to abandon her place in his

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<sup>44</sup> Recommendation of William and Hannah, 23 November 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 246.

<sup>45</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Sarah Simon (mother), 27 June 1768, in McCallum, 226.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Simon (daughter), letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 4 April 1769, in McCallum, 229.

patriarchal family. This effort seemed to work: a note in Wheelock's account books indicated that Sarah boarded with a family "From Feb 6 to May 1, minus one week's absence," so she likely went home for a short visit in the spring of 1769.<sup>47</sup> Despite the effectiveness of Simon's second petition, the underlying fact is that her ability to visit her family rested primarily in Wheelock's hands.

Wheelock's control of students' travel was not always just preventative; sometimes he required students to travel home even if they did not want to. For example, Mary Secuter wrote from her hometown of Charleston in October of 1767, where she had been staying since August, acknowledging that Wheelock wanted her to remain in Charleston until the spring.<sup>48</sup> "I am bound to accept it a token of friendship that you would allow [such a] long time to visit my nation," she began. "But this would be a much longer visit than I've a mind to make at present; I shall return home [to the school] about Thanksgiving, if it be agreeable to your mind."<sup>49</sup> Wheelock, apparently, was not entirely convinced. A month later, Tobias Shattock, a Narragansett tribal leader and former student at Moor's, wrote to Wheelock to explain that he also agreed that Mary should return to the school. "I thought it was best that Molly [Mary] return, have advised her to, and suppose she will. Her behavior has been commendable since she has been down."<sup>50</sup> Shattock's description of Secuter's behavior and desire to return to the school suggests that her separation from the school might have been a punishment or temporary suspension. Either way, Secuter's letter alone did not secure her permission to return to

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<sup>47</sup> *Charity School New Accounts Daybook and Ledger*, 1767 – 1769, DCA 403 (5399).

<sup>48</sup> Wheelock's accounts include a charge for Mary Secuter's visit home on August 17, 1767, and the cost of her boarding from May through October was 8 weeks' fewer than other students. *Charity School New Accounts Daybook and Ledger*, 1767 - 1769. DCA 403 (5399)

<sup>49</sup> Mary Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 12 October 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 235.

<sup>50</sup> Tobias Shattock, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 30 November 1767, DCA WP, MS 767630.2

school; she needed to enlist support from other community members. Records indicate she was back at Moor's by late December, after Wheelock received Shattock's letter. Overall, students' coming and going from the school was largely dependent on Wheelock's permission.

Wheelock also had strict views about indigenous students' appearance, particularly their clothing. In contrast to the Guadalupe school, students' clothing at Moor's school was not uniform; instead, Wheelock often purchased specific items of clothing that were intended for one particular student. For example, in one month he bought a cloak for Miriam Storrs (Delaware) and a hat for Narragansett student Mary Secuter. In fact, Wheelock claimed that he clothed his students with such liberality that it sometimes caused donors to question his generosity and practicality.<sup>51</sup> David Fowler, a Montauk student, felt free to make specific requests regarding his apparel: "I want all my clothes to be blue, and that which is good" he informed Wheelock.<sup>52</sup> In this case, Fowler's choices were intended to send a specific message: blue dye would have required the use of indigo, which did not grow naturally in New England and would have been shipped in. Through his clothing, therefore, Fowler would be able to signal his connections with Europeans and their tradegoods while preaching to indigenous groups.<sup>53</sup>

We have no evidence that the female students expressed similar preferences regarding their clothing, although both Wheelock and other male students seemed to believe that female students did have particular wishes. In one case, David Fowler took

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<sup>51</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to David Fowler, 26 August 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 104.

<sup>52</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 13 May 1766, in McCallum, 102.

<sup>53</sup> See also Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 77 for more on missionary societies' belief in the need to dress indigenous converts in fashionable clothing to convey their importance to their tribe members.

the role of spokesman for the female students upon himself, presenting their desires to Wheelock in conjunction with his own. He informed Wheelock that Amy Johnson, a Mohegan whom Fowler was courting at the time, “wants a Gown very much, [and a] Handkerchief.” Later on, Fowler acknowledged that his role as a go-between in this request was imperfect, and submitted to Wheelock’s broader authority: “[I] don’t know what else she wants, it is likely you will.” In fact, it’s unclear how Fowler learned of Johnson’s clothing desires, and if she had approved of him passing on her requests to Wheelock; the entire letter could reflect Fowler’s embrace of Anglo-American gender norms and his attempts to provide material goods for his future wife. This possibility is underscored by Fowler’s final message regarding Johnson’s clothing. As a prelude to his hoped-for marriage to Amy (which never materialized), he included a much more personal request: “Also I wish you would let her have some fine linen to make her etc.” Presumably, the “etc” referred to undergarments, either a shift or stockings, which were commonly made out of linen. Since the rest of Fowler’s letter referred to his plans to propose to Johnson, he was probably asking Wheelock to help provide her with the clothing she would need for life as a married woman.<sup>54</sup>

Controlling the quality of the clothing options allowed Wheelock some latitude in his budget, which he may have used to his advantage. Hezekiah Calvin, a Delaware student enrolled at the school, complained that Wheelock’s choices regarding his students’ apparel were miserly and represented a misuse of the donations given to the school. Specifically, Calvin believed that Wheelock was selling the material goods donated to him by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, including rice,

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<sup>54</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 2 May 1765, in McCallum, *Letters*, 88.

coffee, flour, sugar, and dyed fabric, keeping the profits, and then clothing the indigenous students with cheaper material. In fact, Calvin argued, the nicest articles of clothing he owned had been given to him by his indigenous parents, not provided by Wheelock. Calvin's complaints spread among the Narragansett residents of Charlestown, and caused enough disturbance that it reached the attention of Edward Deake, the missionary who served one of the Indian churches in the town, who wrote a letter to Wheelock informing him of the "rumors."<sup>55</sup> While Wheelock's account books don't reveal evidence of these particular types of transactions (although this neither proves nor disputes Calvin's accusations), it is clear that Wheelock and his family did make some profit from the process of providing clothing for the students. His wife, daughters, and a few other white women associated with the school were often paid for their handiwork in sewing shirts, cloaks, and other items of clothing.

David Fowler, who had so confidently demanded certain types of clothing, soon encountered the hard limits of Wheelock's generosity. After Fowler's courtship of Johnson ended in failure, he moved on to another student, Hannah Garrett, and married her in August, 1766. Shortly afterwards, he went to a local store to purchase clothes and shoes for himself and Hannah in preparation for their trip to upstate New York as missionaries, seemingly with Wheelock's approval and using the school's credit. Apparently, however, he spent more than Wheelock had anticipated, leading to a verbal altercation between himself and Wheelock, which they then both addressed later via an exchange of letters. According to their memories of the fight, Wheelock angrily told Fowler that his purchases were "too good and too costly" and that it was a sign of

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<sup>55</sup> Edward Deake, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 21 June 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 65.

devilish pride for Fowler to cloth “himself and Hannah like courtiers.” Fowler responded to these accusations by storming out of the room, shouting that he would wear Indian shoes instead of the four pairs of shoes that he had bought, and vowing to repay Wheelock for every penny spent on his room, board, and education over the years.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, however, Wheelock and Fowler reconciled, apparently on Wheelock’s terms: Fowler did travel to Oneida country as planned with Garrett, and in a letter reporting back on his missionary accomplishments to date, informed Wheelock that he had only one pair of shoes and stockings in wearable condition.

The female students did not leave written records of their complaints like Fowler and Calvin, but they seem to have taken a similar position. After Fowler’s argument with Wheelock, he apparently went straight to Hannah Garrett, and the newlyweds spent at least two days together away from the school – in Wheelock’s perspective, an unjustifiable absences and prolongation of the conflict. Garrett must have supported Fowler’s position, or at least decided to remain with him while he stayed angry with Wheelock. As part of Hezekiah Calvin’s complaints, he included information from Mary Secuter, a Narragansett student, who reportedly had asked Wheelock for some material to make a pair of slippers, and had been denied. Wheelock, she said, had told her that such things were “too good for Indians.”<sup>57</sup> Clearly, the female students at the school talked about the apparel options available to them at Moor’s, connecting Wheelock’s dress code with his larger prejudice against indigenous people. Notably, both Fowler and Secuter had received similar invectives from Wheelock, but Calvin chose to use Secuter as his

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<sup>56</sup> See David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, and Eleazar Wheelock, letter to David Fowler (writer’s copy), both on 26 August 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 103–5.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Deake, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 21 June 1768, in McCallum, 65.

source. Secuter was at this point, still a marriage prospect for Calvin, so perhaps their close relationship helps explain why he used her as an example. Nevertheless, Calvin's letter quoting Secuter demonstrates that indigenous men, at least, believed in the influential power of female testimony. More broadly, it points to the type of discrimination that students faced when negotiating with Wheelock for control over their own lives.

In conclusion, indigenous female students at Moor's school faced a system designed to forcibly shape them into Christian wives and mothers, while also allowing Wheelock to profit off of their labor in the meantime. Their education in literacy, although it allowed them to learn to read and write, took second place to their education in domestic skills. In fact, their daily lives were just barely distinguishable from those of indentured servants or apprentices, and in the last few years of the school, this difference was completely erased. Wheelock also exerted his authority by controlling when and how students travelled home to see their families. When providing their clothing, Wheelock strove to ensure that each article appropriately reflected indigenous peoples' place in the world – or at least what he believed that place should be: clean and respectable, but inferior to whites. As the next section will show, these external controls over students' movements, bodies, labor, and clothing were accompanied by Wheelock's attempts to exert control over students' interior lives as well.

### **Paternalism and Affective Control at Moor's**

Eleazar Wheelock's decision to open Moor's was born primarily out of his own emotional needs and self-identity. As a minister in the late eighteenth century, Wheelock also saw strong evidence of "neglect" and "want of charity" on the part of the English

residents of the New World, and he felt it was his responsibility to correct this error.<sup>58</sup> “I have for many years past, had my thoughts much on the piteous state of the Indian Native of this Continent who have been perishing in vast numbers from Age to Age,” he wrote in a letter to famous evangelist George Whitefield, “...I could not but be plotting for them, and devising some method, to spread the knowledge of the true God.”<sup>59</sup> However, his efforts were not entirely altruistic. Rather, his efforts were based in his need to feel that he had done better than previous missionaries. As he wrote in a pamphlet explaining the foundation of the school, he primarily wanted to “clear [him]self, and family, of partaking in the public guilt of our land and nation in such a neglect of [native peoples].”<sup>60</sup> Wheelock’s own emotional stability, therefore, depended in part on the responses of his indigenous students to his mission: if the school failed, so did Wheelock’s ability to clear himself of guilt.

Part of Wheelock’s approach to dealing with this burden of guilt was through re-imagining colonization as a process of incorporation into an Anglicized family. By envisioning himself as a gentle father to the suffering indigenous peoples, he could clear his own conscience of his guilt. As scholars Kristina Bross and Hilary Wyss have argued, Moor’s school offered the perfect opportunity for Wheelock to “turn himself into the patriarch and disciplinarian of all.”<sup>61</sup> In their biography of Wheelock, former Moor’s students David McClure and Elijah Parish (both white), described him as “the father of

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<sup>58</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and present State of the Indian Charity-School, At Lebanon in Connecticut* (Boston: Richard and Samuel Draper, 1763), 10.

<sup>59</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to George Whitefield, 11 March 1756, DCA WP 765201.

<sup>60</sup> Wheelock, *Narrative* 1763, 14.

<sup>61</sup> Kristina Bross and Hilary E. Wyss, eds., *Early Native Literacies in New England: A Documentary and Critical Anthology* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 10.

[a] tawny family.”<sup>62</sup> Wheelock made this approach very clear to his students and school community. For example, in one case he wrote to a Narragansett mother that he would only accept her son into the school under the condition that he would be “brought up and disposed of as of my own son.”<sup>63</sup> As McClure and Parish explained, “This parental style of government was not only agreeable to Dr. Wheelock, but absolutely necessary to the existence of the school.”<sup>64</sup> Through Wheelock’s paternalism, he tried to shape the interior lives of his Indian students, simultaneously civilizing and Christianizing them in an affect-driven process of conversion. In his various writings and pamphlets promoting the school, Wheelock seemed to assume that this parent-child relationship had been successfully established with his students; in his first *Narrative* of the school’s progress in 1763, he wrote that the students were “as perfectly easy and contented with their situation and employment as any at a father’s house.”<sup>65</sup> In his own mind, Wheelock had established an affective and authoritative fatherly relationship with each student, replacing the indigenous students’ own biological fathers.

When this patriarchal role was challenged, Wheelock usually responded by vigorously defending what he believed to be his God-given rule over the Indian students, using emotional appeals to emphasize the familial bonds that supposedly tied them together. For example, in 1771 Samson Occom wrote a letter to Wheelock accusing him of prioritizing the education of white students over Indian students. Wheelock replied by redefining Occom’s critiques as an outbreak of sinful pride, and reminding Occom of the

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<sup>62</sup> David McClure and Elijah Parish, *Memoirs of the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, D.D.* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 24.

<sup>63</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Sarah Simon (mother), 27 June 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 225.

<sup>64</sup> McClure and Parish, *Memoirs of the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, D.D.*, 24.

<sup>65</sup> Wheelock, *Narrative* 1763, 36-37.

emotional connection that purportedly undergirded their relationship. He ended his letter by saying, “With love to you and Mrs. Occom, I am yet your friend and well-wisher.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, when challenged by Occom, Wheelock immediately claimed the moral high ground, portraying himself as the long-suffering but loving father of a wayward son – despite the fact that Occom was 48 years old at this point, and only twelve years younger than Wheelock. When Narragansett James Simon withdrew from the school, Wheelock explained to his mother that he had only accepted James into the school under the condition that James submit to his paternal authority.<sup>67</sup> Now that Simon had left without Wheelock’s blessing, Wheelock demanded that he repay the school for the cost of his education. As historian Laura Murray suggests, the affective ties of missionary paternalism were undergirded by the power imbalance inherent in colonialism; Wheelock’s relationship with his students remained fatherly only as long as they obeyed him.<sup>68</sup>

Wheelock required equally affect-laden expression of regret and repentance from students who committed transgressions. When Wheelock decided that a student’s behavior was unacceptable – mostly regarding drinking, “lewd behavior,” and similar actions – they were required to sign a confession stating that they regretted their actions and vowed to never repeat them again. Hezekiah Calvin (Delaware), for example, wrote to Wheelock after a drinking incident. “With shamefacedness and humbleness of heart I write you these lines, owning and confessing my heinous crimes,” he explained.

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<sup>66</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Samson Occom, 15 August 1771, DCA WP 771465.

<sup>67</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Sarah Simon (mother), 27 June 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 225.

<sup>68</sup> See Laura Murray, “‘Pray Sir, Consider a Little’: Rituals of Subordination and Strategies of Resistance in the Letters of Hezekiah Calvin and David Fowler to Eleazar Wheelock, 1764-1768,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 4, no. 2/3 (1992): 48–74.

Specifically, he continued “last evening...I confess I was drunk. Swearing and cursing followed, which I knew not of, only as I was informed so this morning, and am sorry for it.”<sup>69</sup> These confessions followed a standard pattern: an acknowledgment of the sin, expressions of shame and regret, and a resolution to reform, signed by the student and witnessed by Wheelock or another teacher. The confession was then stored in the school archives.

This practice had such a strong impact on student body at Moor’s that Joseph Johnson and Samson Occom, both Mohegan students who went on to become ordained ministers and published authors, drew upon the confession genre even after they left the school. In the late 1760s, after a decade spent preaching, teaching, and even traveling to England as a fund-raiser, Samson Occom became drunk in public one day – an episode he would later blame on not having eaten enough prior to drinking. Nevertheless, his error put him in danger of being suspended by the foreign ministry board, who had authorized his ordination, and so he wrote to the board to ask their forgiveness. His letter followed the same standard content of the confessions written out at Moor’s. He began by identifying his wrong-doing: “I have been shamefully overtaken by strong drink...blacken[ing] my own character and [bringing] a reproach on the ministry,” then admitting his guilt: “for which, in the sights of God, I am ashamed, I am sorry, and sincerely repent.” Finally, he made a commitment to change: “I resolve, relying upon the grace of God, to keep a better guard and watch over myself.”<sup>70</sup> Joseph Johnson, after having studied at Moor’s school for eight years (from ages seven to fifteen years old) and then worked as a teacher for three, abandoned his assigned teaching position for the more

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<sup>69</sup> Hezekiah Calvin’s Confession, 26 December 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 60.

<sup>70</sup> Samson Occom’s Confession, 4 January 1769, in DCA WP 769104.

worldly employment of a whaling boat for a few years in the late 1760s. Having decided he wished to re-enter the missionary circuit, he wrote a similar confession asking to be restored to Wheelock's good graces. "I am ashamed and conscience stings me to the very heart," he explained to Wheelock, yet he wondered how he could "make his sorrow credible." The answer, it appeared to him, was to write out his guilt to Wheelock, making his repentance intelligible to the white community through the written word.<sup>71</sup> The validity of repentance depended not only on the interior feelings of Calvin, Occom, or Johnson, but on the repentance being performed and communicated directly to Wheelock.

The confessions written by the female students, however, displayed one major difference from those written by male students. While the majority of male student confessions were their own compositions, albeit according to a general formula and pattern, the female student's confessions were written for them by Wheelock or another teacher, and simply signed by the female students. For example, in March of 1768, Mary Secuter and Hannah Nonesuch, a recently admitted Mohegan student, spent the evening together in a local tavern and returned to school drunk. Three days later, they both signed written confession statements that had been prepared for them, most likely by instructor Bezaleel Woodward, with very similar content:

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 28 December 1768, in Laura J Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 74-75.

I Hannah Nonesuch do with shamefacedness acknowledge that on the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> Inst I was (by the enticement of Sarah Wyoggs) guilty of being at the tavern and tarrying there with a company of Indian boys & girls, for (what is commonly called) a frolic. Where was much spirituous liquor drank, and much dancing and rude conduct and in tarrying to an unseasonable time of night, with much rude and vain company –

all which conduct I am fully sensible is much to the dishonor of God and very prejudicial to the design and reputation of this school and to the good of my own soul, and the souls of my mates. For which sinful and wicked conduct of mine I am heartily sorry, and desire to lie low in the dust, and do now beg forgiveness of God, the Rev and worthy Doctor Wheelock, his family and school, and all whom I have hereby offended –

and I do promise that by the grace of God I will

never offend by the like, or any other misconduct for time to come. And I desire and warn all my mates not to take occasion by this misconduct of mine to commit the like or any other evil.

I Mary Secuter do with shamefacedness acknowledge that on the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> Inst I was guilty of going to the tavern and tarrying there with much rude and vain company till a very unseasonable time of the night where was dancing and other rude and unseemly conduct, and in particular drinking too much spirituous liquor whereby I was exposed to commit many gross sins, which offence is doubly aggravated in that it is a direct violation of a late promise I have publicly made before this school – all which wicked and sinful conduct of mine, I am fully sensible, is much to the dishonor of God and very prejudicial to the design and reputation of this school, and in opposition to the good of my own soul and the souls of my mates – for which I deserve to be turned out of this school and be deprived of all the privileges of it. I desire to lie low in the dust therefore and do now ask forgiveness of God, The Rev Doctor Wheelock, his family and school, and all others who I have hereby offended – and I desire now with my whole heart to renew my former engagement that I will never drink any spirituous liquor on any occasion where necessity does not require it, and I do promise that (by the grace of God) I will amend my past life and never offend by any of the like or any other misconduct for time to come. And desire once more to warn all my mates not to take occasion by this or any other instance of my misconduct, to commit the like or any other evil – and I beg the privilege of continuing still a member of this school and that I may enjoy the privileges of it, for a trial of the sincerity of this my confession and my engagement for an amendment of life.

It is notable that these confessions, although dealing with the same event, were not completely identical.<sup>72</sup> Nonesuch's behavior was partly excused, or at least the blame for her conduct was shared, with Sarah Wyoggs (or Wyacks), a former student, who apparently tempted her to enter the tavern. No such justification was offered for Secuter. Moreover, her actions seem to have jeopardized her ability to remain a student in good standing at the school, given the repeated petitions in the confession that she be allowed to remain at Moor's. The slight leniency shown to Nonesuch might have been a reflection of the fact that she had been at the school for less than a year, while Secuter had been a student for several years and had been caught drinking once already, in late December 1767. The remainder of the content of the confessions, however, were essentially the same. It is easy to imagine Woodward writing out both confessions, one after another, drawing on an established bank of penitential phrases like "shamefacedness," "lying low in the dust" and "warning my mates" before summoning Wheelock and the two girls to witness and sign the statements.<sup>73</sup>

These formulaic confessions, composed by the school faculty, did not allow any room for the students themselves to explain or defend their actions. In contrast, male confessions, authored by the students, frequently contained denials of at least part of the charges. In his confession for drunkenness, Hezekiah Calvin apologized for swearing and cursing, but interjected that "I hear that they say I make mock at your Night Discourses,

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<sup>72</sup> Confession of Hannah Nonesuch, 11 March 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 232–33. Confession of Mary Secuter, 11 March 1768, in McCallum, 237–38.

<sup>73</sup> In her PhD dissertation, Stacy Hogsett drew an interesting connection between the phrase "lying low in the dust" and Isaiah 47:1 where immodest virgins are ordered to "sit in the dust." The possibility that the phrase referred sexual misconduct, however, was counterbalanced by the fact that in the book of Job, he "slept in the dust" (7:21) as a lament, without confessing any sin. Most likely, therefore, the phrase was just a reference to extreme repentance. Stacy Hogsett, "'The Tawny Family': The Life Course of Indian Value Adaptation for Eleazar Wheelock's Indian Scholars," PhD Dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1998.

which I think is false.”<sup>74</sup> In another case, Joseph Johnson wrote a letter to completely absolve himself from any wrongdoing in a reported fight with another classmate. He acknowledged that he and another student, the Mohegan Gourdain Wyoggs, had been wrestling, but explained that it was “all in jest...as in horsetime” and emphasized that the fight was “not violent,” and added that another student, the white Eleazar Sweetland, would be able to testify that the wrestling match was just play.<sup>75</sup> Mary Secuter and Hannah Nonesuch, however, had no such opportunity to explain their actions. While Nonesuch signed her confession with an “X,” indicating that she was unable to write her name, Secuter not only signed her own name, but had exchanged several letters with Wheelock already, which she had written herself in a clear and legible hand. Clearly, however, Wheelock either did not want his female students to write their own confessions, or did not believe that they would be capable of writing such a lengthy composition on their own.

Wheelock tried to inculcate two types of feelings in his students: affection for him as a paternal authority figure, and shame and regret for any transgressions. When students did not voluntarily produce these feelings, Wheelock used threats and force to compel them. For example, he required female students to sign confessions that they had not written, making them testify that they felt sorry for their infractions without giving them any control over the content of these confessions. When students challenged his patriarchal authority, Wheelock was quick to remind him of their reliance on him for

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<sup>74</sup> Confession of Hezekiah Calvin, 26 December 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 60.

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 6 September 1764, Newberry Library [hereafter NL], Ayer Collection, MS 453.

economic support and social support, threatening to withdraw these benefits if they failed to acknowledge his power over them.

### **Female Students' Agency**

Despite Wheelock's attempt to exert total control over Moor's and its students, evidence shows that the female indigenous students enacted their own agency in both subtle and dramatic ways, even impacting the overall trajectory of the school. They resisted Wheelock's colonizing efforts without completely rupturing their relationship with him. This allowed them to benefit in certain ways from their connection with him, while ameliorating his negative impact on their lives. At Moor's, indigenous women advocated for themselves and their family members, formed pan-tribal connections among themselves, and managed to resist conforming to most of Wheelock's goals for them, using strategies other than open rebellion.

The school itself had its origins the request of an indigenous woman. Samson Occom, the Mohegan man whose academic and spiritual success inspired Wheelock to open a school, asked his mother to serve as an intermediary in establishing a relationship with Wheelock. In fact, it was Sarah Occom, recently widowed, who first told her son in 1743 that Wheelock had been educating white students, and possibly suggested to him that he should go and study with Wheelock. New England tribes, including the Mohegan, had increasingly turned to literacy and legal maneuvers as a strategy for resisting colonialism, hoping to use the English legal system to defend their landholdings.<sup>76</sup> In his

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<sup>76</sup> See Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, Chapter 8; Lisa Tanya Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), Chapter 2; Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663-1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Chapter 2; and Hilary E. Wyss, *English Letters and Indian Literacies: Reading, Writing, and New England Missionary Schools, 1750-1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), Chapter 1.

autobiography, Occom recounted how after hearing about Wheelock's tutoring of white students, he had a "great inclination" to go study with Wheelock, and "desired my mother to ask Mr. Wheelock whether he would take me a little while to instruct me in reading. Mother did so, and when she came back, she said Mr. Wheelock wanted to see me as soon as possible."<sup>77</sup> Occom ended up staying and studying with Wheelock for several years and serving as the template for future Moor's students, all due to his mother's initial intercession on his behalf.

Twenty-some years later, Sarah Simon (the mother, hereafter referred to as Mrs. Simon for clarity) played a similar role in getting her children accepted into Wheelock's school. Her correspondence with Wheelock shows the influence that both she and her daughter Sarah had on Moor's, as well as on the larger Charlestown Narragansett community. Mrs. Simon seemed to be dedicated to pursuing education for her children, sending her oldest son and daughter, Emmanuel and Sarah, to the school in the mid-1760s. In an October 1767 letter, signed by Mrs. Simon but probably written by the missionary Edward Deake, she requested that Wheelock accept one more child, her son James. A few days later, however, she wrote to Wheelock again. In this letter, she did not rely on Deake as an intermediary. Instead, the handwriting and spelling indicates that Mrs. Simon wrote this letter herself, or possibly had another Narragansett write it. In this more direct method of communication, Simon grew bolder in her request, asking that Wheelock not only accept James, but also re-admit Emmanuel, who had lived at the

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<sup>77</sup> Samson Occom, "Autobiographical Narrative, Second Draft [September 17, 1768]," in Joanna Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Literature and Leadership in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54.

school for just a few months in 1763 before withdrawing, as well as another unnamed daughter, fourteen years old.<sup>78</sup>

Sarah Simon, the daughter, also played a crucial role in this request. First, she must have influenced her mother's perception of Moor's and demonstrated that it would be a good idea to send more children there, despite Emmanuel's difficulties. As she explained to Wheelock, Mrs. Simon's desire to send additional children to Moor's was based "in the account my daughter Sarah has given me of your pious care of those children which are under your tuition" which gave her "great satisfaction."<sup>79</sup> Sarah herself must also have made a plea to Wheelock in person on behalf of her brothers. Wheelock acquiesced to Mrs. Simon's request, specifically because Sarah pleaded on her siblings' behalf. He wrote to Mrs. Simon that he would accept two of her sons as well as re-admitting Emmanuel, doing so "not to please myself," he explained in a written reply to Mrs. Simon, "but at your earnest desire by your daughter Sarah, who told me you had given [them] to me to bring up and dispose of as my own."<sup>80</sup> By the time that Mrs. Simon made her request, Wheelock had already begun to grow disillusioned with former Moor's students, particularly those like Emmanuel who had seemingly rejected his educational plan. Nevertheless, when faced with petitions from indigenous women and girls, he decided to re-admit Emmanuel, perhaps against his initial inclination. While the Simon children had a mixed experience at Moor's – Sarah would end up unhappy with her experience and leave the school in 1768 -- the point remains that it was the influence and

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<sup>78</sup> Sarah Simon (daughter), letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 12 October 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 227–28.

<sup>79</sup> Sarah Simon (daughter), letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 9 October 1767, in McCallum, 227.

<sup>80</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Sarah Simon (mother), 27 June 1768, in McCallum, 225–26.

decision-making of indigenous women that facilitated their entrance into the school.

Wheelock never mentioned the petitions of indigenous men as having any similar effect.

Female students also contributed to the development of Moor's school as a center of pan-Indian connections that was only partially controlled by Wheelock. As Peter Silver, David Silverman, Daniel Mandell, and many others have argued, the mid-eighteenth century was a time of growing racial identity among both whites and Indians, when those categories began to be understood as innate biological categories that superseded national or tribal divisions – as shown most clearly by Pontiac's 1762 uprising.<sup>81</sup> These racial categories lay at the heart of Wheelock's school. The indigenous students were bound together by their shared experience with white racism and prejudice against them.<sup>82</sup> For example, the indigenous students sat in specially designated places in Wheelock's church: the boys were given "a pew in the gallery over the west stairs" while "Mr. Wheelock's Indian girls [sat] in the hind seat of the women's side below."<sup>83</sup> Racial identity became clearer to indigenous students when they inhabited a primarily white world.

Moreover, Wheelock intentionally brought together students from various tribes, hoping that they would learn each other's languages and eliminate the need for interpreters.<sup>84</sup> While the students were probably much more aware of their different origins -- Hezekiah Calvin, Delaware, later described himself as "dumb stump that has no

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<sup>81</sup> Daniel R. Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780–1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> Axtell, *The Invasion Within*, 210.

<sup>83</sup> Congregational Church, *The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Organization of the Congregational Church in Columbia, CT* (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockward, & Co. 1867), 51.

<sup>84</sup> Wheelock, *Narrative* 1763, 17, 18.

tongue” among the Mohawks – their experiences at Moor’s helped them see themselves as part of a larger indigenous group.<sup>85</sup> As historian Joanna Brooks has argued, “Moor’s Indian Charity School served a vital role in fostering new intertribal connections between young Algonkian, Lenape (Delaware), and Iroquois men and women, connections that would deepen over time into important political relationships.”<sup>86</sup> Later on (see chapter 4), the connections between some Moor’s graduates would develop into a separatist Christian Indian community that would move to upstate New York, incorporating members of seven different tribes on the Connecticut/Rhode Island coast.

One way that female students helped strengthen this pan-Indian identity was by forming connections with other students through Moor’s but outside of the school boundaries. For example, Mohegan student Sarah Wyacks (also spelled Wyoggs or Wyoge), entered Moor’s in 1762. The next fall, she was sent back to the Connecticut/Rhode Island border to recruit another female student – Wheelock paid the costs of her one-week journey to “procure” Hannah Poquiantup (Niantic).<sup>87</sup> While both Wyacks and Poquiantup were born into Christian Indian families and seem to have been related to Samson Occom, they belonged to different tribes. The journey back to Moor’s together, therefore, must have been an opportunity to discover some of their commonalities.<sup>88</sup> Wyacks was “rusticated,” meaning expelled or suspended (possibly for

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<sup>85</sup> Hezekiah Calvin, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 August 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 58.

<sup>86</sup> Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 16.

<sup>87</sup> *Ledger B, Journal 1760-1764*, November 1763, DCA 403 (5399).

<sup>88</sup> Sarah Wyacks called Mohegan home and wrote a letter to Samson Occom in 1763 in which she addressed him as “brother.” Her exact identity is a mystery since there is no reference to a sister named Sarah in records of Occom’s family. His mother was named Sarah and was widowed by the time Samson Occom was a teenager, so Sarah Wyacks could have been a half-sister to Samson through a second marriage. See Sarah Wyacks, letter to Samson Occom, 2 Aug 1763, in Connecticut Historical Society, Samson Occom Papers, Correspondence, primarily to Occom, 1761-1765. Whatever Sarah’s relationship with Samson, in the letter she expresses concern over the fact that her mother does not attend church

health reasons) in 1764, but Poquiantup remained in the school at least through 1766.<sup>89</sup>

Four years after she left the school, Wyacks reappeared in Lebanon Crank, where she apparently joined current students Hannah Nonesuch and Mary Secuter in a night of drinking at the local tavern.<sup>90</sup> Just as in the case of Anna Ventura at Guadalupe, departure from the school itself did not mean exclusion from the broader school community.

Moor's became a locus of relationship-building between Indian students, beyond what Wheelock had originally envisioned.

Additionally, even on the school grounds, Wheelock's particularly gendered paternalism gave female students slightly more space to negotiate. Wheelock's emotional investment in his students heavily favored the male students. Even after opening the Female School, he stated that if only ten percent of the boys at the school became "good and useful Men," it would be worth his "Toil and Expense for the whole" – leaving girls out of the equation entirely.<sup>91</sup> While Wheelock occasionally referred to the male students as sons, he never used the word daughter in any of his pamphlets about the school, and the female students boarded with village families, not in his home. For his authority over the female students, Wheelock relied on typical Anglo gender norms, where women were subjugated to their fathers or husbands. Many of the character attributes that Wheelock strove to inculcate in his male students, like humility and docility, were assumed to be natural qualities among women.<sup>92</sup> Paradoxically, Wheelock's relative emotional

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services as often as she used to, indicating that Sarah grew up in a Christian family. For information on Hannah Poquiantup's family, see Love, *Samson Occom*, 357.

<sup>89</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 13 May 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 102.

<sup>90</sup> Confession of Hannah Nonesuch, 11 March 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 232.

<sup>91</sup> Wheelock, *Narrative* 1763, 28

<sup>92</sup> Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 6.

detachment from his female students gave them more room to maneuver and subtly shift the parameters of his relationship with them.

One of the most important ways that female indigenous students resisted Wheelock's goals was by retaining control over their marriage decisions. This control is particularly surprising given that the male students seemed to embrace Wheelock's plan to use the female school to produce future wives for them. For example, Hezekiah Calvin (Delaware) frequently expressed a desire to wed Mary Secuter; as he wrote to Wheelock, "Since the Doctor [Wheelock] encouraged me in it...nothing was in my thoughts but being married."<sup>93</sup> David Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown), another student, courted at least three different girls from the school: Amy Johnson (Mohegan) in May 1765, Hannah Poquiantup (Niantic) in May 1766, and finally Hannah Garrett (Pequot/Brothertown), whom he married in August 1766. In his first letter to Wheelock regarding marriage to Amy Johnson, he proclaimed his love for her, but also offered another reasons why she should become his wife. In comparison with other Moor's students, he claimed, he particularly required a woman who could "turn her hand to anything that belongs to housewifery."<sup>94</sup> For this reason, he argued, Wheelock should approve his match with Johnson. Fowler apparently saw the girls as a commodity, parceled out to the Indian missionaries according to their needs, and implied that courtship was simply a matter of Wheelock choosing his future mate.

The reality was, however, that Wheelock did not have complete control over these matches. Indigenous fathers also retained some influence over their daughters' marriages, interacting in complex ways with Wheelock's authority. For example, John Secuter

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<sup>93</sup> Hezekiah Calvin, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, March 1768, in McCallum, *Letters*, 63.

<sup>94</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 2 May 1765, in McCallum, *Letters*, 88–89.

(Narragansett), Mary Secuter's father, wrote to Wheelock to tell him that he did not approve of Hezekiah Calvin's proposal to marry his daughter. He knew that the couple had been discussing marriage plans, and asked Wheelock to "use [his] reasonable powers to dissuade my Daughter from such design."<sup>95</sup> Interestingly, Secuter made it clear that he "by no means" consented to the match, but still seemed to need Wheelock's support to ensure that it would fail. Joseph Woolley used Wheelock as an intermediary to ask for Hannah Garrett's father's permission to marry her, asking that Wheelock "write to Mr. Garrett in favor of the cause, which his daughter and I have been about."<sup>96</sup> Both cases indicate that the father's opinion was treated as important, but not necessarily the deciding factor in the marriage; the couples had already discussed wedlock before involving their parents, and Wheelock's approval or disapproval was solicited in both cases. Wheelock's involvement in the marriage negotiations reveals his importance as a paternal figure in the lives of both his male and female students; lacking the legal power to officially prevent or force marriages, Wheelock used his powers of persuasion to influence developing relationships. In the end, however, despite Wheelock's role as intermediary, the girls seem to have had the power to reject or accept their suitors' proposals.

Despite the seeming importance of parental opinion, both biological parents and Wheelock *in loco parentis*, women had the ultimate authority to decide whom to marry. David Fowler and Joseph Woolley both expressed terror that the girls would reject their proposals. "I can't take it well [from] her, if just at the end, she should turn the contrary," Woolley explained in a letter to Wheelock regarding his courtship of Hannah Garrett –

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<sup>95</sup> John Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 31 March 1767, McCallum, *Letters*, 53.

<sup>96</sup> Joseph Woolley to Eleazar Wheelock, 17 August [no year], in McCallum, *Letters*, 270.

evidently a well-founded fear, since she married Fowler a year later.<sup>97</sup> Despite Hezekiah Calvin's desire to wed Mary Secuter, Wheelock commented that she would not accept him unless his economic prospects improved.<sup>98</sup> While Calvin, Fowler, and Woolley considered the opinions of Wheelock and the girls' parents to be important, they were primarily dependent on the girls' acceptance.

From the male students' letters, we know that at least four female students (Hannah Garrett, Amy Johnson, Hannah Poquiantup, and Mary Secuter) had the opportunity to marry indigenous missionaries, sometimes receiving multiple proposals of marriage. Nevertheless, only one woman, Hannah Garrett, married a Moor's graduate. While we have no access to Amy Johnson and Hannah Poquiantup's reasons for rejecting their suitors, Mary Secuter did write a letter analyzing her own relationship with Hezekiah Calvin. In 1768, after at least two years of being in a relationship with him, she was still debating her future plans. In a letter to Wheelock, she explained that she thought it "best not to marry him" because she had concerns about his fidelity: "I think he has no regards for me more than he has for any girl," she explained. Curiously, she also said that her parents thought she should marry Calvin (a contradiction to the 1766 letter from John Secuter). She thus begged Wheelock's counsel: "Sir, I hope you will tell me what is my duty to do and I will do it."<sup>99</sup> Perhaps Secuter's parents really did have a change of heart. More intriguing is the possibility that Secuter was intentionally playing Wheelock by encouraging him to take a stance opposite those of her parents. If Secuter truly did not want to marry Calvin, but also did not want to anger Wheelock by rejecting Calvin out-

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<sup>97</sup> Joseph Woolley to Eleazar Wheelock, 17 August [no year], in McCallum, *Letters*, 270.

<sup>98</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to John Brainerd, 8 July 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 56.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 16 November 1768, DCA WP 768616.

of-hand, perhaps she was trying to manipulate Wheelock into believing he had made the decision himself. After all, if Wheelock knew better than indigenous parents how to raise children, Narraganset support of a potential marriage might just have convinced Wheelock to stand more firmly in opposition. Whether Secuter was trying to manipulate Wheelock or simply express the facts, she achieved her goal of breaking off her relationship with Calvin without angering Wheelock.

In avoiding marriage to other male students, the female students subverted one of Wheelock's main goals for the school. Moreover, they exerted influence over their marriage prospects in a manner more in line with traditional coastal New England indigenous practices. Although the role of affect and individual choice was growing more important in Anglo-American society during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, marriages were still a social contract typically negotiated by parents and the community at large, with little regard for input from the bride-to-be.<sup>100</sup> By comparison, Algonquian and Eastern Woodlands cultures were markedly more egalitarian, and allowed for greater participation by women in negotiating marriages.<sup>101</sup> In this context, it is striking that the male Indian students accepted their role in Wheelock's plan and assiduously courted girls at the school, while the female students managed to either reject their solicitations or otherwise make themselves unavailable as marriage partners.

In their correspondence and interactions with Wheelock, the female students carefully balanced their criticisms, requests, and claims to self-determination with

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<sup>100</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 119–22.

<sup>101</sup> See Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Kathleen Bragdon, "Gender as a Social Category in Native Southern New England," *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 4 (1996): 573–92.

deferential acknowledgements of Wheelock's paternalism, maneuvering within the system to maintain more agency over their own lives. Miriam Storr's 1768 letter to Wheelock after leaving the school exemplifies this strategy. She had spent six years at the school, becoming an adult without accomplishing Wheelock's goal for her of marrying a missionary. In her letter, however, Storrs presented herself as having been sent forth from Moor's in order to fulfill her Christian destiny, rather than simply aging out of the school. First, she described her homesickness for the school, and how she wept "nights and hours when I saw every one out of my Sight" after leaving Connecticut to journey back to New Jersey. Furthermore, she emphasized the differences between Moor's and the corrupt world, lamenting that she had only heard "filthy talk" instead of prayers after leaving. The only reason for persevering in her travels, she explained, was the hope of eventually finding herself "being where she should be" – meaning where God had called her to be.<sup>102</sup> This rhetoric helped convey to Wheelock that Storrs had not rejected Christianity when leaving the school.

Moreover, Storrs' letter accentuated the importance of the paternal relationship between Wheelock and his students over any of the other goals for the school. She described her departure from the school as leaving Wheelock's home ("since I went from thy house"), despite the fact that she boarded with other families in town, not with Wheelock. The awkward syntax of the postscript to her letter to Wheelock also prioritized familial bonds over educational goals. "PS to Remember to all the family I am in health," she wrote, "and to the school."<sup>103</sup> She first emphasized her affective relationship with Wheelock's family, reassuring him that his efforts in that realm had

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<sup>102</sup> Miriam Storrs, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 29 November 1768, DCA WP 768624.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

been a success, while placing less importance on his educational initiative. A 1772 letter to Wheelock from missionary John Brainerd, in contrast, contained disappointment with Storrs' life path. He described her as "managing but poorly" and suffering from rheumatism, which he hoped would be "good for her soul," indicating that perhaps she had moved away from Christianity.<sup>104</sup> Storrs' own self-representation to Wheelock, however, focused on the ways in which she was a good Christian and a member of Wheelock's family. In doing so, she made it more likely that Wheelock might assist her in the future.

Sarah Simon and Mary Secuter also carefully balanced their opposition to Wheelock's educational goals with appeals to Wheelock's Christian nature, preserving their relationship with him while also voicing criticism. After a troubled year in which she was punished multiple times for school infractions, Secuter decided to withdraw from the school on July 28, 1768. She informed Wheelock via a letter:

Reverend and ever Honored Sir  
 I am not insensible of my obligation to the doctor for his paternal care over me ever since I have been at the school. My faults have been overlooked with tenderness when they have deserved severity – I am quite discouraged with myself. The longer I stay in the school the worse I am – don't think I shall ever do any good to the cause: and it will cost a great deal to keep me hear, which will be spending money to no purpose. I have been more trouble to the doctor than all my mates. Don't think I deserve the honor of being in your school, if agreeable to the Doctor I should be glad to leave the school next week and be no longer a member of it.  
 Honored Sir, I would beg leave to subscribe myself,  
 Your Humble Servant,  
 Mary Secuter<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> John Brainerd, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 25 December 1772, in Brainerd, 395–396.

<sup>105</sup> Mary Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 28 July 1768, DCA WP 768428.2.

In this letter, Secuter first recognized Wheelock's paternal role in the school, which fit with Wheelock's own description of himself as "father of his tawny family."<sup>106</sup> She also absolved him of any blame, expressing gratitude for his treatment of her and yet despair at her own inability to progress according to his plans. Then, however, she pointed out two reasons why Wheelock should not try to keep her at the school. First, she would not "ever do any good to the cause." In Wheelock's writings, "the cause" usually referred to his wider plan of sending out Indian missionaries to convert tribes. Secuter here might have been suggesting that she would never be fit to be a missionary wife. Her second reason pointed to Wheelock's underlying worries about the school: its financial solvency. Although keeping a female student at the school cost less than providing for a male one, Secuter seemed to think that the opportunity to save even a little money might be convincing to Wheelock. Apparently, her letter helped her achieve her goal: sometime that summer, Secuter did indeed return to her home in Charlestown permanently.

Notably, however, Secuters's withdrawal from the school did not end her relationship with Wheelock. The letter that she wrote to him asking for advice about Hezekiah Calvin's marriage proposal, discussed previously, was written *after* she had left the school. Unlike the male students, Mary was able to withdraw from Wheelock's school while still being on good terms with him. Given that she was the one to initiate contact again with Wheelock, preserving this relationship must have been important or beneficial to her, and she was able to construct her interactions with him in a way that allowed this to happen. By engaging with Wheelock's patriarchal norms yet expressing

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<sup>106</sup> McClure and Parish, *Memoirs of the Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, D.D.*, 24.

her own viewpoints, Secuter navigated Wheelock's expectations and exerted her own agency without completely destroying her relationship with him.

Sarah Simon used a similar strategy to withdraw from Moor's. In a letter dated only 1769, she wrote to Wheelock to express her spiritual confusion, saying that religious matters no longer looked "so plain to me as I have seen them." The root of her struggle was the fear that she was not a true Christian, because she felt tempted by the devil and found no comfort in prayer. She decided that her "duty" was to "come and take [Wheelock's] advice."<sup>107</sup> However, she also acknowledged that Wheelock had already given her a great deal of counsel, which she had been unable to apply to her life. The fault for this disconnect, she argued, did not lie with either Simon or Wheelock, but with the devil himself. Essentially, Simon portrayed her struggles to fit in at the school as part of a cosmic battle between good and evil, not a personal failing on her part that might deserve Wheelock's wrath. Unlike Secuter's letter, Simon's did not express a clear desire for departure from Moor's; but payments for her boarding costs disappeared from the school records sometime between May and November of 1769.

Despite Sarah's withdrawal, the Simon family's involvement with Moor's continued. Her younger brother Daniel enrolled in the school in 1770, shortly after Sarah had left. In 1771, Wheelock essentially abandoned his plan of teaching Indian students, and moved his educational endeavor to the north, where he could train white missionaries for work among the Iroquois and Mohawk. The two Simon brothers were the only two Indian students who accompanied him on this move. Sarah's emotional departure from the school and inability to achieve a complete conversion was apparently not a barrier to

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<sup>107</sup> Sarah Simons, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 16 [no month] 1769, DCA WP 769900.1.

her brothers' participation in Wheelock's plan. Once again, a female student managed to achieve her goals without provoking Wheelock's anger.

In analyzing the oppressive paternalism that undergirded Moor's, historian Laura Murray argues that the indigenous students' only possible avenue of resistance was to expose the violence contained with Wheelock's imagined parent-child relationship, eliminating both the positive and negative aspects of this colonial paternalism. The best-known male graduates of Moor's – Hezekiah Calvin, David Fowler, Samsom Occom, and Joseph Johnson – all attempted to do this, eventually cutting ties with Wheelock in letters that explicitly identified ways in which Wheelock's paternalism was harmful, condescending, and self-serving. Murray concludes that their agency in connection with Wheelock stopped there. The male students had to choose between asserting their independence, which meant rejecting Wheelock and all his financial and affective support, or maintaining their relationship with him by continuously acknowledging and inscribing their subservience.<sup>108</sup>

The female students, however, found a third path. In comparison with the male Indian students, the female students had more autonomy to shape the impact of missionary paternalism on their lives. Both male and female students expressed dissatisfaction with their school experience, and carried out acts of resistance to colonialism, but the female students were able to do so without completely rupturing their relationship with Wheelock. In fact, the female students seemed to actively cultivate a relationship with him even after leaving his school. By performing the raced and gendered role articulated by Wheelock, the female students solidified his confidence in

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<sup>108</sup> See Murray, "Pray Sir, Consider a Little."

his own whiteness and paternal authority, thereby enlarging the spaces in which they could maneuver.

## Conclusion

Eleazar Wheelock's eight-year experiment in educating indigenous girls failed to achieve many of the goals that he intended. His careful control of students' daily lives, his regulation of their clothing and travel, and his efforts to establish a paternal relationship with his students and inculcate feelings of repentance and shame in them were all steps to achieving his "Great Design": mass conversion of indigenous people. Nevertheless, his school only produced one marriage, and the female alumnae did not go on to become the types of exemplary Anglicized Christian women that Wheelock had hoped to create. His greatest success, so to speak, was where he most clearly held the upper hand: in his ability to profit off of indigenous girls' labor.

Despite being immersed in a discursive environment shaped by Wheelock's paternalism, students were also able to use this rhetoric to advance their own goals. Examining what historian Michael McDonnell calls "gendered strategies of resistance" calls attention to the fact that the female students were in many ways more successful in employing this discourse than the male students.<sup>109</sup> While they, like the male students, chafed under Wheelock's condescension and exploitation and found themselves struggling with the tenets of evangelical Christianity, the female students managed to reject Wheelock's plan for their lives while simultaneously preserving their relationship with him. The experiences and choices of Sarah Simon, Mary Secuter, Miriam Storrs,

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<sup>109</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, "'Il a Epousé Une Sauvagesse': Indian and Métis Persistence Across Imperial and National Borders," in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 149–71.

and the other female students at Moor's School illuminate ways in which Indian women maneuvered within the pressures of colonialism, missionary paternalism, and labor exploitation to claim some measure of control over their own lives.

## Part I: Conclusion

In many ways, similar forces shaped the experiences of students like Amy Johnson and Caterina del Sacramento. Both the Guadalupe school and Moor's Female School were conceptualized as places that would form indigenous girls in Christianity and European gender norms, as well as instructing them in the basics of literacy. To accomplish these goals, the schools' founders and directors carefully charted out daily and weekly schedules for the students and tried to control substantial portions of both their exterior and interior lives. Both schools, however, were partially reliant on their students' labor in order to survive financially, and in a certain sense were also dependent on the female students' performances of gratitude, repentance, and fictive parent-child relationships in order to maintain their *raison d'être*. These dependencies, coupled with the tools of literacy that the students acquired at the schools, allowed the indigenous girls to find openings for self-advocacy and stronger indigenous identity. While the specific details of this argument vary depending on the school, the general thesis applies to both.

Of course, the size and scope of these two schools were considerably different. Located in one of the major capital cities of Spanish America, the Guadalupe school operated under its initial formation and charter for nearly sixty years, until it became a convent staffed by the teaching order of *Enseñanza* nuns in 1811 (a change that will be discussed in chapter five). Anywhere from twelve to thirty girls lived at the school itself during these decades, and probably hundreds if not thousands of students attended the free day school over the years. In contrast, Moor's school was only open to female students for about eight years, and enrolled eighteen students during that time. The village of Lebanon Crank, where the school was located, was far from large cities like

New York and Philadelphia, and even a day or two's journey away from coastal indigenous settlements like Charlestown or Farmington, where hundreds of Pequots, Narragansetts, and Mohegans lived.

Moreover, different perspectives on gender within Catholic Ibero-America and Protestant Anglo-America had a major impact on each school's development. While the establishment of a school for indigenous girls faced opposition in both locations, colonial Mexico had a long tradition of female-only spaces, particularly convents and *recogimientos*. Moreover, as Matthew O'Hara has argued, Spanish colonial leaders considered indigenous women to be less threatening than indigenous men. For this reason, they approved the construction of convents for indigenous women, while denying the foundation of a proposed seminary for indigenous men.<sup>1</sup> The Guadalupe school, although not a convent, fit in well with general trends in perspectives on race and gender in late eighteenth century Mexico. In contrast, Eleazar Wheelock seemed to be concerned that benefactors would think a female school was useless and refuse to donate. When he first mentioned his idea for the school in a fundraising pamphlet, he buttressed his proposal with a lengthy footnote explaining exactly how the education of indigenous girls would contribute to the overall conversion of indigenous people.<sup>2</sup> Part of the problem for Wheelock, of course, was that education for Anglo girls at this time rarely included formal education, whereas in Mexico City a school for Spanish and Creole girls had existed for centuries.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew D. O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in Mexico, 1749–1857* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009), 71–86.

<sup>2</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Original Design, Rise, Progress and Present State of the Indian Charity-School, at Lebanon in Connecticut* (Boston: Richard and Samuel Draper, 1763), 34–35.

<sup>3</sup> E. Jennifer Monaghan, "The Uses of Literacy by Girls in Colonial America," in *Girls and Literacy in America: Historical Perspectives to the Present*, ed. Jane Greer (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 1–23;

The different cultural backgrounds regarding female-only spaces, coupled with the longevity of the Guadalupe school as compared to Moor's, also impacted indigenous women's ability to attain leadership positions within the school. Convents and schools in colonial Mexico had an established precedent of women rising within their ranks to eventually become abbess or headmistress of the school. At the Guadalupe school, indigenous *colegialas* became headmistresses and responsible for governing the school. At Moor's, Eleazar Wheelock reserved all the teaching positions for white women, particularly those related to him or other white male teachers at the school. Although he had intended for indigenous women to become respectable missionary wives and therefore leaders in their communities in a certain sense, even these positions would not have garnered them more formal authority. The existence of female leadership positions within Spanish Catholicism, although subject to under male authority, provided an avenue for indigenous women in the Guadalupe school to exercise greater influence within the constructs of colonial society. The women at Moor's school simply did not have a comparable opportunity.

Despite this one major difference, there were many other similarities between the two schools. Surprisingly, the existent source base for the two schools is fairly similar in terms of both quantity, type, and authorship. Embedded within the hyper-literate society of Congregationalist New England, both Eleazar Wheelock and some of the female Moor's students produced writings that directly reflected upon the school's purpose, operations, and impact upon its students. In colonial Mexico, where diaries, pamphlets,

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Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, "Escuelas, Colegios, y Conventos Para Niñas y Mujeres Indígenas En El Siglo XVIII," in *Obedecer, Servir, y Resistir: La Educación de Las Mujeres En La Historia de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2003), 45–62; Elizabeth Teresa Howe, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008).

and letters were not as common, appeals to the king for permission to establish the school and for increased funding constituted the majority of the written record. Indigenous women's voices mainly appeared as testimonies in hagiographies and other documents that attempt to demonstrate the impact of Creole men's generosity and faith. Eleazar Wheelock's account books contain additional information about the costs of operating Moor's school, while occasional financial reports from the Guadalupe school sent to the vice-regal court reveal similar data. In both cases, the majority of the information about the structure and organization of the school comes from the male founders, while indigenous women's perspective is gleaned from a handful of letters they wrote, as well as quotes from them contained writings by others.

These sources reveal several similarities between underlying principles that shaped the schools. As the proceeding chapters have shown, both schools relied on paternalism to structure the school and command obedience from students – a decision which may have encouraged students' compliance with the rules but also opened room for negotiation. Secondly, both schools unintentionally facilitated students' connections with broader indigenous communities, as both locations became an important node on a city-wide or regional indigenous network. Finally, both schools differed from their male counterparts in one essential area: the girls' schools never allowed a non-indigenous girl to live at the school, while the boys' schools were never exclusively indigenous.

The constitutions and school rules at both Guadalupe and Moor's placed a great deal of emphasis on the paternal or maternal relationship that school leaders were supposed to establish with students. This approach was designed to smooth over the inherent violence involved in colonizers' relationship with indigenous people. As Julius

Rubin argues, missionary paternalism “granted natives the unenviable status of ‘children’ in perpetual tutelage to colonial authority.”<sup>4</sup> When Wheelock, Herdoñana, or Guadalupe school rectresses assumed the role of father or mother, they created emotional obligations for their students, which helped diffuse any attempts to rebel against the broader system. This affective-based authority bears strong resemblance to Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of symbolic violence: a “gentle, invisible form of violence...the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety.”<sup>5</sup> Both schools were designed to inculcate indigenous students in Christianity, European languages, and western gender norms, thereby erasing indigenous culture and identity. Wheelock and the Guadalupe school directors’ methods of paternally correcting students into specified patterns of behavior, therefore, became a conduit for the subjugating effects of colonialism. As Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton have theorized, intimate spheres – like the household and the classroom – were often the location of the “most spectacular and quotidian forms of violence, all in the name of civilization and uplift.”<sup>6</sup> When a non-indigenous authority figure stood *in loco parentis* over an indigenous student, they automatically inscribed colonial power imbalances onto the relationship.

However, this focus on affect also created a certain level of mutual dependence between the students and school leaders. While the students had to depend on the school leadership for their food, housing, and education, the schools also relied on the students to produce appropriate emotional displays of gratitude and repentance. In both locations,

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<sup>4</sup> Julius H. Rubin, *Tears of Repentance: Christian Indian Identity and Community in Colonial Southern New England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 78.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Laura Murray, “‘Pray Sir, Consider a Little:’ Rituals of Subordination and Strategies of Resistance in the Letters of Hezekiah Calvin and David Fowler to Eleazar Wheelock, 1764-1768,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 4, no. 2/3 (1992): 52.

<sup>6</sup> Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 10.

school leaders' authority was undergirded by paternalism, and their own self-identity relied, at least in part, on students' demonstrations of affect. Students' ability (or threatened ability) to disrupt this cycle gave them a certain level of influence over school leadership. Miriam Storrs and Mary Secuter, for example, avoided fulfilling Eleazar Wheelock's goals for their lives, but still managed to maintain a cordial relationship with him through their rhetorical skills. The fame and reputation of Guadalupe school founder Antonio Herdãñona and school protector don Francisco Gamboa depended partly on the testimony of female students, which was published or recorded in official documents and distributed to the public. By complying with or resisting the affective relationships that school officials hoped to engender, female students were able to negotiate more space for their own autonomy.

Moreover, at both locations the female students' connections with each other and with the broader indigenous community stretched well beyond the school boundaries and official control. The Guadalupe school was an essential component of a network that connected other indigenous institutions like San Gregorio and the convent of Corpus Christi. For example, an alumna of the Guadalupe school petitioned the San Gregorio confraternity (a religious brotherhood dedicated to charity) for a dowry that would allow her niece to enter the convent of Corpus Christi.<sup>7</sup> When the San Gregorio community was angered by the removal of the image of Our Lady of Loreto, students from the Guadalupe school helped petition and fundraise for its return.<sup>8</sup> At Moor's, female students and

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<sup>7</sup> Ileana Schmidt Diaz de Leon, *Colegio Seminario De Indios De San Gregorio Y El Desarrollo De La Indianidad En El Centro de Mexico 1586 - 1856* (Guanajuato, Mexico: University of Guanajuato, 2012), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Ana Ventura Gómez sobre se le concede licencia de coleccionar limosna, 22 December 1790, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales, Clero Regular y Secular, Volumen 22, Exp. 15.

former students met at taverns, despite Wheelock's disapproval. They talked with other students about their treatment and influenced their parents' perceptions of the school. Although both schools were intended to help indigenous children acculturate to Spanish or British colonial society, they also reinforced students' indigenous identity, and facilitated connections between indigenous people who may not have met each other if it weren't for the school.

What is perhaps most important about both Guadalupe and Moor's is that they were the only locations where indigenous children received a Western-style education with exclusively indigenous peers. Comparable schools for indigenous boys, in both colonial New England and Mexico, did not have an entirely indigenous student body. At San Gregorio, poor Spanish and Creole boys were also accepted into the school, and the school's resident rector was always a non-indigenous priest. Eleazar Wheelock, for his part, enrolled at least eight white boys who were interested in becoming missionaries to indigenous tribes in Moor's.<sup>9</sup> In both schools, the mixture of races caused conflict.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, only indigenous girls were ever allowed to enroll at either Moor's or Guadalupe; the student body at both remained exclusively indigenous. The European gender norms that emphasized the need to protect women, which so often ended up circumscribing indigenous women's freedoms, in this case created a unique space. Students at Moor's

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<sup>9</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The Indian History of an American Institution: Native Americans and Dartmouth* (Hanover, N.H: Dartmouth University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, David McClure's description of a fight between William Wheelock and Joseph Johnson after Wheelock called Johnson an "Indian devil". David McClure to Eleazar Wheelock, 25 September 1765, in McCallum, 76-77. There is less evidence of racial conflict among students at San Gregorio, although in one case a scholarship was awarded to a mixed-race student rather than an indigenous student to wide complaint (see Schmidt Diaz de Leon, 38). Furthermore, in the nineteenth-century indigenous students and alumnae vigorously but unsuccessfully proposed San Gregorio's merger with another school for non-indigenous boys. The merger was finalized in 1828; while San Gregorio remained in existence, it lost its special characteristic as a school dedicated exclusively to indigenous students. See Schmidt Diaz de Leon, chapter 3.

and Guadalupe were slightly freer, as compared to their male peers, to work out their own understanding of indigenous identity without facing racial prejudice from other students.

Caterina del Sacramento and Amy Johnson, mentioned at the introduction of this section, had surprisingly similar experiences. They, along with students like María Petra Pérez, María Elviro, Ana Ventura Gomez, Mary Secuter, Sarah Simon, and Miriam Storrs, just to name a few, underwent attempts to strip them of their language, culture, and connections with their families through an education system designed to accommodate them to colonialism. But through their time at the school, they also discovered and created ways to influence male colonial authorities, use colonial systems to their own advantage, and strengthen indigenous networks. In the next section, we will see how even larger projects emerged: the creation of exclusively Christian Indian spaces, without the oversight of European missionaries, headmistresses, or schoolteachers.

## Part Two: Gender and the Establishment of Christian Indian Spaces

This time, it was indigenous men who gathered in support of a new foundation.

*Over three hundred indigenous noblemen gathered in Oaxaca, Mexico to request that a convent be built exclusively for indigenous women.*

*A group of nine Tunxis men from Farmington wrote to seven other tribes, encouraging them to join them in founding a Christian Indian community.*

The men envisioned a new type of space: a place where indigenous people could practice Christianity under the authority of their own leaders, rather than submitting to Euro-American religious superiors.

From  
1745 until 1782

this broad coalition of indigenous men,  
incorporating people of various ethnic, tribal, and linguistic backgrounds  
organized, campaigned, and petitioned for the creation of these new spaces.

1773 until 1785

While their campaign was sometimes stymied by  
opposition from church officials                      the Revolutionary War and the resulting  
in the throes of the Bourbon reforms                      geopolitical reorganization of North America  
the indigenous men were eventually successful,  
leading to the establishment of  
the Cacicas' Convent                      Brothertown  
in the spring of 1782.                      in the fall of 1785.

Although women's voices were rarely recorded in the public negotiations, gender was an important component of the rhetoric surrounding the campaign.

Both indigenous coalitions deployed European gender norms in their arguments for the creation of these Christian Indian Spaces, asserting that indigenous people, too, could become *virtuous Catholic nuns*, *virtuous Christian men and women*, and that with the establishment of this new space, indigenous men could finally demonstrate their own ability to achieve the trappings of Euro-American manhood within a broader colonial context.

### **Chapter 3: “Transplanting the lilies”: Gendered rhetoric and the creation of the *Cacicas*’ convent, 1742-1782**

The establishment of the convent of Corpus Christi for indigenous women in Mexico City (1724, see Introduction) had been followed by the creation of the convent of Nuestra Señora de Cosamaloapan in 1737 in Valladolid (modern-day Morelia) under similar circumstances as Corpus Christi, as well as the foundation of the Guadalupe school in 1754 (see Chapter 1). These three institutions helped confirm the acceptability of Christian spaces designed exclusively for indigenous women in Mexico. All three, however, also had the backing of wealthy and powerful Creole or Spanish donors, who had enough political capital to override any objections. The founding of the convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, opened in Oaxaca in 1782 and popularly known as the *Cacicas*’ Convent, stands in contrast to the origins of the other three institutions. The *Cacicas*’ Convent was initiated entirely by indigenous people, who undertook a campaign that lasted over forty years to convince the bishops of Oaxaca, the viceroys of Mexico, and the Spanish monarchy to support another foundation for indigenous women. Who were these *caciques*? What motivated them to start a campaign for a new convent for indigenous women? Why were they successful? Documentation surrounding the campaign, which involved over 400 indigenous men, reveals a wealth of information about the indigenous groups that supported the convent, Creole perspectives on the project, and the ways in which the development of the *Cacicas*’ Convent reflected larger trends in Oaxacan and Mexican history.

Up until recently, scholarship surrounding the *Cacicas*’ Convent had been limited mainly to histories focusing on studies of nuns and convents, with rarely more than a few

pages dedicated to the Oaxaca project.<sup>1</sup> As interest in indigenous ethnic, intellectual, and religious history has grown, however, historians have begun to examine more closely the rhetorical positions taken by the caciques. Matthew O'Hara includes the foundation of the convent in his 2009 monograph *A Flock Divided*, which focused on the relationship between indigenous people, the church, and the Mexican government both before and after independence. He placed the convent within the larger context of indigenous resistance to the elimination of indigenous-only spaces.<sup>2</sup> In a 2013 article, Mónica Díaz offers the longest analysis of the petition process to date, arguing that the written petitions reveal that caciques wanted to build the convent as a demonstration of their pride in their indigenous heritage, and as a demonstration of their equality with Spaniards. "The petitioners sought recognition and respect as Indians and nobles," she concluded, "and succeeded by using the language and rhetorical tools put in place by the colonial system."<sup>3</sup> Both O'Hara and Díaz's analysis focuses on the concept of ethnicity as a unifying force, which it most certainly was. This chapter, however, draws on the broader historical context of the petitions in order to understand the identity and motivation of individual caciques, as well as the reasons why church officials either supported or opposed the project. Once the full context of the convent's establishment is clarified, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the role of gender in the rhetoric used by both indigenous and Spanish or creole men.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the pioneering work by Josefina Muriel, *Conventos de monjas en la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Editorial Santiago, 1946); Asunción Lavrin, "Indian Brides of Christ: Creating New Spaces for Indigenous Women in New Spain," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 1999; Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew D. O'Hara, *A Flock Divided: Race, Religion, and Politics in Mexico, 1749–1857* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Mónica Díaz, "'Es Honor de Su Nación': Legal Rhetoric, Ethnic Alliances and the Opening of an Indigenous Convent in Colonial Oaxaca," *Colonial Latin American Review* 22, no. 2 (August 2013): 254, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10609164.2013.808470>.

## **Eighteenth-century Indigenous Landscape in Oaxaca**

It is perhaps not surprising that Oaxaca was the site of an unusual level of indigenous mobilization, as it has long been known as a stronghold of indigenous identity within the colonial Mexican landscape. In the colonial period, Oaxaca was one of the most ethno-linguistically diverse regions in Mexico, a status that it maintains to this day; modern ethnographers and linguists have identified around 16 different indigenous groups resident in the state, with hundreds of different dialects spoken. At the time of the Spanish conquest, three major groups dominated: the Zapotecs, the earliest documented inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico; the Mixtecs, a smaller and somewhat later arriving group; and the Nahuas, who had conquered the region in the mid-fifteenth century and left behind enough settlers and soldiers to enforce tribute payments to Tenochtitlan. While deaths from disease and harsh treatment did affect population levels, the ratio of indigenous peoples to Spaniards remained unusually high throughout the colonial period: in the late 1700s, there were approximately nine indigenous for every Spaniard.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps because of these high population ratios, the natives of Oaxaca were also unusually successful at defending local autonomy against Spanish desires to centralize administration: over 900 villages obtained official recognition from Spanish authorities, keeping their own structures of governance intact.

The existence of so many small villages meant that there was also a large number of indigenous leaders, both male and female, who maintained control over their local area. They were bolstered by an economy that depended mainly on cochineal production throughout the colonial period, an intricate process that involved the harvesting of the

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<sup>4</sup> William B Taylor, *Landlord and Peasant in Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), 19, 34.

small insects that secreted a coveted red dye. After some experimentation, the Spanish discovered that it was most cost-effective to allow indigenous people to continue harvesting cochineal in their traditional methods, and then collect taxes and fees at the end. Having native people in charge of this commodity at the lowest level allowed many caciques and villages to resist becoming economically dependent on Spanish landowners.<sup>5</sup> As Karen Caplan concludes, “For the most part, late colonial Oaxaca consisted of numerous indigenous towns that, in their structures of governance, had been deeply affected by Spanish institutions but nevertheless retained a striking measure of independence from them.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Rodolfo Pastor has noted in his study of the Mixtec region of Oaxaca that caciques there retained more power later into the colonial period than almost anywhere else in Mexico, due in part to the “peaceful conquest, the denseness of the indigenous population, the slow and modest growth of the Spanish haciendas,” and the caciques’ ability to adapt to the new circumstances of the colonial world.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century this power increasingly came under threat for a few reasons. The people as a whole – both caciques and commoners -- faced increasing supervision of their religious practice after episodes of idolatry were reported to the bishop in the early 1700s. While many extirpation campaigns in Spanish America took place during the first or second generation after conquest, in Oaxaca, the biggest

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, 195; See also Margarita Menegus Bornemann and Rodolfo Aguirre Salvador, *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVIII* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2006), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Karen Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Rodolfo Pastor, *Campesinos y Reformas: La Mixteca, 1700-1856* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 82.

challenge to Christianity took place in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> In the mountainous outskirts of Oaxaca, native religious practices had maintained a strong presence throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, possibly even remaining the main religious framework for the region.<sup>9</sup> Dominican friars working with the diocese of Oaxaca had focused on eradicating idolatry since the 1660s, but the conflict came to a head on September 14, 1700, in the Zapotec highlands of Oaxaca, near the town of Villa Alta. On that night, two Zapotec *fiscales* from the small town of San Francisco Caxones [or Cajones], don Juan Baptista and Jacinto de los Ángeles, informed a group of Spanish merchants about a supposedly idolatrous feast taking place at the home of a political rival. The Spanish merchants quickly told local Dominican friars, who burst into the gathering and seized evidence of non-Christian religious practices. The next day, the two informers were seized by a mob of angry villagers, and publicly whipped in the main square before being carried off, never to be seen by the Spanish again; they were presumed to have died. Investigations into the gathering and the probable murders led to a strong crackdown against local autonomy by the united Spanish and ecclesiastical governments, what David Tavárez has described as the “most ambitious idolatry extirpation campaign in New Spain” on record and Yanna Yannakakis has called “a second conquest of the Sierra Norte.”<sup>10</sup> Reforms of parish boundaries and evangelization territory replaced many of the Dominican friars with diocesan priests, who were more

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Clendinnen, Inga, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-1570* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Serge Gruzinski, *The Conquest of Mexico: Westernization of Indian Societies from the 16th to the 18th Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993); Patricia Lopes Don, *Bonfires of Culture: Franciscans, Indigenous Leaders, and Inquisition in Early Mexico, 1524-1540* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010); and David Tavárez, *The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 70.

<sup>10</sup> Tavárez, *The Invisible War*, 193; Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between*, 92.

subject to the authority of the bishop. Native intermediaries, who had negotiated certain forms of autonomy for villages in the area, lost much of their power.<sup>11</sup> Three other idolatry extirpation campaigns took place in the Zapotecan highlands: in Yatzachi in 1710, Lachitaa in 1718, and Yalálag in 1735, although with less bloodshed and conflict than in San Francisco Caxones.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the appearance of idolatry gave ecclesiastical authorities reason to impose closer monitoring of indigenous practices and justified more intrusive methods of religious oversight.

Secondly, caciques found themselves facing economic and political pressure from two directions. Under the aegis of the Bourbon reforms, Spain began attempting to curtail some of the privileges that had been extended to indigenous people as part of the colonial governance structure of the *república de indios*. While the Spanish monarchy had long recognized the importance of indigenous leaders from the upper echelons of Native society, these new reforms reflected the growing stratification of colonial society based solely on racial lines. Many of the traditional responsibilities of caciques were taken over by mid-level colonial government officials put into place by the reforms, and membership in the elite class of indigenous no longer carried as much social weight.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, an empire-wide push towards mercantilism opened up new avenues for creating wealth through trade, and some indigenous people from outside the governing families were able to become landowners, accrue economic resources, and garner political support. This emerging class, what might be termed in other contexts as the

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<sup>11</sup> Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between*, 92–95.

<sup>12</sup> María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi, “La Historia Colonial,” in *Oaxaca: Historia Breve*, by María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi et al. (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2010), 73.

<sup>13</sup> See Nils Jacobsen, *Mirages of Transition: The Peruvian Altiplano, 1780-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between*.

*nouveau riche*, often used their newly-gained resources to challenge the authority of the dynastic families and their hereditary control of cacique positions: sometimes by integrating themselves into the elite networks through marriage or business connections, and sometimes by outright legal or political competition. Notably, historian Rodolfo Pastor has found that the period of 1700-1740, immediately before the convent was proposed, was a time of growing challenges to cacique power.<sup>14</sup> The diffusion of indigenous authority can also be seen in the proliferation of independent villages, which both allowed many more indigenous people to become local leaders while also limiting the amount of resources, capital, and political clout that any one village could amass.<sup>15</sup> In short, while Spain was working to curtail the power of the indigenous caciques, members of the lower classes were asserting their rights to what power did remain in the hands of indigenous people. Yanna Yannakakis, in her analysis of the interactions of caciques with the colonial juridical system, concludes that by the end of the eighteenth century, “[indigenous nobles’] legal tactics, and the emotive power of their rhetoric, reveal a desperate attempt to hang on to privileges that were slipping through their fingers.”<sup>16</sup>

The convent, therefore, was originally intended to send a message to two groups. By constructing a convent for indigenous women within the heart of the colonial capital of Oaxaca, the caciques would remind the Spanish of the power, wealth, and influence that they still wielded. As they said, this convent would be to the “honor of their nation” and establish the importance of Oaxacan indigenous peoples in comparison with those

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<sup>14</sup> Pastor, *Campesinos y Reformas*, 165.

<sup>15</sup> Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between*, 216.

throughout Mexico and the Spanish Empire.<sup>17</sup> More effectively than a statue or a monument, the convent would communicate to passers-by that the indigenous people of Oaxaca were as pious, generous, and devoted to the Catholic Church as the Spanish or Creole populations. At the same time, specifying that the future nuns had to come from the noble classes would help continue to differentiate between the indigenous elites and commoners, and continue the tradition of special benefits for the descendants of indigenous nobility. As Mónica Díaz has written, the convent demonstrated caciques' desire to both "participate more fully in the dominant religious culture of the colony" and "affirm their local power."<sup>18</sup> This objective, however, proved to be difficult to attain. It took nearly forty years – from the first gathering in 1742 until the convent opened in 1782 – for the caciques' desires to be realized, hampered along the way by opposition from both the Spanish colonial authorities, as well as fragmentation within their own indigenous networks.

Part of the length of the process stemmed from the fact that the establishment of any convent in colonial Mexico involved a rigorous set of examinations and careful consideration on the part of multiple ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Typically, the idea would originate with a bishop, secular political authority, or private donor. Regardless of who initiated the process, that person or group had to prove that the convent would abide by certain rules set by the Council of Trent (1545-1563) regarding location, finances, and size. Papal approval was required for any new religious institution, but under Spain's *Real Patronato*, the authority to approve or deny religious institutions

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<sup>17</sup> Don Manuel Velasco y Victoria, don Vicente Velasco y Victoria, and don Manuel Velasco de Aguilar, letter to the Oaxacan cabildo, 27 June 1769, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 162, see also Díaz, "Es Honor de Su Nación."

<sup>18</sup> Díaz, 236.

was transferred to the Spanish monarchy. Despite the far-flung, decentralized nature of the Spanish Empire, the monarchy seemed to take particular care in granting or withholding approval for a convent, paying special attention to the dependability of funding and the potential impact on established religious foundations in the same region. The final step in establishing a convent was finding a small group of nuns from another convent to serve as the founding sisters of the new one, since women entering the convent had to serve a period of time as postulants before making final professions and becoming eligible for leadership positions within the convent. Transferring nuns required additional levels of approval – both from the convent sending the nuns, as well as permission from the Pope to temporarily suspend their vows of enclosure to travel to the new convent. For most convents, this entire process took about three to six years, from initial conception to final completion.<sup>19</sup> The more powerful and wealthy the plan's backers, the quicker the process usually went. For the indigenous people of Oaxaca, in comparison, it would be forty years between the first proposal of the convent and its opening, marked by three “waves” of activity: 1742-1745, 1753-1754, and 1766-1768. On May 16, 1768, the king granted his royal permission for the foundation for the convent, but debates over the specific funding base, location of the convent, and the construction itself delayed the opening of the convent until 1782.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the process for founding a Capuchin convent in Oaxaca for Spanish and creole women, which was initiated in 1729 and approved in 1731. “Actos hechos por el Cabildo y regimiento de la Ciudad de Antequera, Valle de Oaxaca en orden a la fundación de un convento de religiosas capuchinas,” 1729-1733, Biblioteca Juan de Córdova [hereafter BJdC], Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán, Sección Religiosa, Caja 57, Fundaciones.

### Initial proposal: 1742-1745

The idea for the Cacicas' convent seems to have originated with a group of elite caciques resident in Antequera, Oaxaca, in the fall of 1742, who declared in a document called a *poder* that they were placing legal representation on the project in the hands of two particular caciques. Curiously, the copy of the petition record that eventually made its way to Spain named different men as the legal representatives of the cacique group than the copy that is now held by the Newberry Library.<sup>20</sup> The Spanish document names don Baltazar Martínez y Sánchez and don Domingo Gonzáles y Zárate as having received this *poder* in March of 1742, while the Newberry document records don Manuel de Velasco y Aguilar and don Joseph López de Chávez as having received these *poderes* on October 23, 1742. Given that Velasco and López would appear as the leaders on the remainder of the petitions through 1766, it seems likely that Martínez and Gonzáles typically represented caciques in legal matters, but gave their *poderes* to Velasco and López for this case.

The date of when the petition was presented to the Oaxacan diocesan authorities, or church *cabildo*, is also somewhat unclear. The petition itself is undated, but has often been assumed to be written on the same date as the second *poderes* document, October 23, 1742. However, the petition itself mentions the recent death of Bishop Tomás

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<sup>20</sup> See Expediente de los Indios Nobles Caciques de la Ciudad de Antequera, 1742-1775, Archivo General de las Indias [hereafter AGI], Mexico 2661. This file contains about twenty separate documents, as well as two bound and paginated notebooks which record a portion of the petition process. For the unbound documents in the file, I cite the title of the document and do not give a page number. For the documents included in the notebooks, I use the second notebook (segundo cuaderno), which has slightly clearer handwriting, and give the page number. See also Diligencias Practicadas para la fabrica de la hermita..., 1742-1789, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 32-311. This file is contained entirely within a bound and paginated notebook; in references, I cite the specific title of the document to help orient the reader, but also cite the page number.

Montaño y Aarón, which occurred on October 24, 1742.<sup>21</sup> The cabildo responded on May 13, 1743. Therefore, the petition must have been submitted sometime between October 25, 1742, and May 13, 1743. A subsequent reference to the first petition identifies it as being from 1742, so the later months of 1742 is the most likely time period.<sup>22</sup>

The petition document, along with the *poderes*, indicate that forty-seven caciques supported the idea of building a convent for indigenous women. These caciques represented thirteen different villages, in addition to a few who gave their hometown as Antequera.<sup>23</sup> All of the villages were relatively large, located mostly in the central valley with a few extending into the Sierra Norte, the mountain range to the north and east of Antequera. The petition document itself offers no clues as to the ethnic identity of the caciques; as Karen Caplan has argued, by the late eighteenth century, indigenous people rarely identified themselves as Zapotec, Mixtec, or any of the other local ethnicities when interacting with the colonial state.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, when these same caciques appeared in other legal proceedings, such as local land conflicts or issues regarding debts, they were often part of a group that did need a translator. In those cases, a wide variety of languages were documented: Zapotec

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<sup>21</sup> José Antonio Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Impr. del Comercio, 1881), 290; Eulogio Gregorio Gillow, *Apuntes históricos* (Mexico City: Impr. del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, 1889), 103. Over the next few decades, the caciques would seem to intentionally try to file their petitions shortly after the death of a bishop; perhaps this strategy was in place from the start.

<sup>22</sup> Miranda, Joseph Alejandro and Quintana, Juan Joseph, letter to Carlos III, undated (late 1766), AGI, Mexico 2661, segundo cuaderno, 38r.

<sup>23</sup> These villages were: Coyotepec, Cuilapan, Etla, Istepexi, Ixtlan, Papalutla, San Cristobal, San Juan Chicomezuchil, San Pedro Martir, San Sebastian Tutla, Santa Anna Zegache, Santa Catarina Quiané, and Teosapotlan (the name for Zaachila used by Nahuatl-speakers).

<sup>24</sup> Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens*, 246.

(including reference to a specific dialect, Netzicho); Mixtec, and Nahuatl.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, of the thirteen villages listed, some were traditional Zapotec strongholds, such as Ixtlan, Etlá, and Santa Anna Zegache, while others, like Cuilapan, were majority Mixtec. One group of caciques said they came from Teosapotlan, the Nahuatl name for the village more commonly known as Zaachila. While the majority of the caciques came from Zapotec-majority villages – a fact that would remain true throughout the petition process – the representation of Mixtecs and Nahuas was significant enough to demonstrate that this was truly a multi-ethnic movement.

On the other hand, although the caciques portrayed themselves as being from various villages, the court scribe described them as residents of Antequera, and said that he could testify to identity of each one of them (a legal necessity in colonial times, before the advent of government-provided ID cards). Indeed, when these same caciques appeared in other court cases, they often identified Antequera as their place of residence.<sup>26</sup> Overall, they seem to have belonged to a group of urbanized indigenous elites, often referred to as *ladinos*. The term *ladino* carried a great deal of meaning in colonial Mexican society. Originally, it referred to people of both Jewish and Spanish descent within Spain, as well as the Judeo-Spanish language that emerged from this mixture. In the New World, it was quickly used to describe people of both indigenous and Spanish parentage. It soon expanded, however, to also describe indigenous people

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<sup>25</sup> Zapotec: Nombremiento de Tutores, 23 August 1747, Archivo Histórico Juridical de Oaxaca [hereafter AHJO], Villa Alta, Civil, Leg 12, Exp 19.07, 19r; Zapotec Netzicho: “Aparecieron por una parte Juan de Mendoza...” 1745, AHJO, Villa Alta, Civil, Leg 12, Exp 04, 1745; Mixtec: Poder General, 8 August 1711, Archivo Historico de Notarias de Oaxaca [hereafter AHNO], Arauxo, 103:183; Nahuatl: Fundación de obras pías, 15 July 1699, AHNO, Benaías, 152:350.

<sup>26</sup> In searches at the AHNO, AHJO, the Archivo Municipal Histórico de Oaxaca, and the Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca, I was able to find information about 35 caciques; of those, 16 were identified specifically as residents of Antequera.

who were very familiar with the language, culture, and customs of Spanish colonizers. According to Yanna Yannakakis, a “ladino” existed in an ambivalent state: they were “intermediary figures” with “a foot in either world.”<sup>27</sup> In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, more and more caciques had moved into Oaxaca from their villages, although often they maintained residences in both places, recognizing the need to be closer to Spanish centers of power if they were to advance socioeconomically. Scholars have argued that this *ladinization*, as Rodolfo Pastor calls it, distanced caciques from the villages that they supposedly represented. By moving to capital cities such as Antequera, adopting Spanish garb, and speaking Spanish, the caciques often created the perception that they were rejecting indigenous culture in favor of full assimilation to Spanish colonial systems.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, these methods in some ways echoed traditional approaches, when noble families maintained representation in urban centers even before Spanish conquest. Moreover, this seeming acculturation also was a method of obtaining privileges based on noble status.<sup>29</sup>

The forty-seven caciques who signed this petition did, indeed, come from the upper echelons of indigenous society. According to their self-identification in the petition, thirty-nine were caciques and two were governors, meaning they had attained (or more specifically, been born into) the highest positions of local authority. The rest identified themselves as *alcaldes* (mayors), *regidores* (police chiefs), and principle men, all names of positions in indigenous town councils.<sup>30</sup> The family of don Juan de Velasco

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<sup>27</sup> Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-Between*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Pastor, *Campesinos y Reformas*, 168.

<sup>29</sup> Margarita Menegus Bornemann, “Los Estudiantes Indígenas de Oaxaca En La Real Universidad de Mexico,” *Acervos: Boletín de Los Archivos y Bibliotecas de Oaxaca*, no. 25 (Spring 2002): 233.

<sup>30</sup> The documents held by the NL and the AGI seem to be transcripts of the entire petition process, compiled by scribes at a later date. All the names are therefore written by the same hand, making it impossible to determine literacy rates or compare signatures among the petitioners.

y Aguilar, one of the two caciques who spearheaded the project, testifies to the existence of a network of indigenous elites that extended through Oaxaca and all the way to Mexico City. Velasco was an organist at the Oaxacan Cathedral, a position that required approval from diocesan authorities and indicated that he was a member of the minor clergy, a status that gave him a certain amount of authority without being ordained a priest.<sup>31</sup> In 1747, he received a raise from the Oaxcan church cabildo of 50 pesos for his work as an organist, which brought his yearly salary up to 300 pesos.<sup>32</sup> The next year, he successfully petitioned the cabildo to also be given the position of tuner of the two organs in the Cathedral, for which he received a salary of another 150 pesos.<sup>33</sup> In other words, Velasco probably had close relationships with many of the men on the cabildo and in the upper ranks of Church authority in Antequera, and knew how to work within the system to obtain what he wanted.

And Juan Manuel Velasco y Aguilar was not the only member of his family to be closely involved with the church hierarchy. In the 1742 petition, Juan de Velasco, another signatory, also identified himself as a cacique, cleric, and musician at the Oaxacan Cathedral. Twelve years later, he helped file a petition directly with the viceroy in support of the convent. In the interim, he had apparently moved to Mexico City and become an organist there: he introduced himself in the 1754 petition as a “cacique from Oaxaca, and organist at the Holy Metropolitan Church of this city of Mexico” – in

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<sup>31</sup> The category of minor clergy has generally been replaced by “minister” by the Catholic Church and refers to a person who assisted with liturgies or other responsibilities of the church, such as lector, acolyte (alter server), cantor, or deacon.

<sup>32</sup> Aumento de Salario, 17 March 1747, Archivo Histórico de la Arquidiócesis de Antequera, Oaxaca [hereafter AHAAO], Actos de Cabildo, Book 5, 212v-213. Available online at [musicat.unam.mx](http://musicat.unam.mx), register number OAX 27000316.

<sup>33</sup> Solicitud y aceptación de organista, 1 April 1748, AHAAO, Actos de Cabildo, Book 5, 220-220v. Available online at [musicat.unam.mx](http://musicat.unam.mx), register number OAX 27000328.

modern terms, the cathedral of Mexico City.<sup>34</sup> Two other petition signatories, don Manuel and don Vincente de Velasco y Victoria, also became priests, while still identifying as caciques from Juan Manuel de Velasco y Aguilar's hometown of San Mathias Xalatlaco. Presumably, the three were cousins.<sup>35</sup> Later on, a female relative of Manuel de Velasco, Aniceta María Velasco y Sánchez, traveled to Mexico City to enter the convent of Corpus Christi, becoming the last woman from Oaxaca to enter that convent.<sup>36</sup> In her application for admission into the convent, she mentioned her family connections with the Oaxacan organist as a method of proving her worthiness.<sup>37</sup>

The Velasco family was not the only one to have close connections with the Catholic Church. Notably, nine indigenous men who identified themselves as both priests and caciques signed the petitions over the years: two of the forty-seven signatories in 1742, and seven of the 154 signatories in 1753 were priests, representing about 5% of the total indigenous supporters for the project in both cases. Each time, they were listed at the very top of the group, as clearly their support for the project was most likely to impress and persuade the Oaxacan cabildo. This gathering of indigenous priests appears even more unusual when placed within the context of ordination in New Spain overall. Throughout most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indigenous men were

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<sup>34</sup> Petition of Juan de Velasco, 19 February 1754, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 134.

<sup>35</sup> Petition, 6 September 1753, NL, Ayer Collection, MS 1144, 137-143r; don Manuel and don Vicente de Velasco y Victoria, and don Manuel Velasco de Aguilar, letter to the Fiscal of New Spain, 27 June 1769, NL, Ayer Collection, MS 1144, 158-162r.

<sup>36</sup> For a list of all the women who professed in Corpus Christi, see Josefina Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001), 55-65; More information about Aniceta María de Velasco y Sánchez's admission file is in Ann Miriam Gallagher, R. S. M., "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 164, 169.

<sup>37</sup> Gallagher, R. S. M., "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821," 169. Aniceta was accepted into Corpus Christi in 1781, the year before the Cacicas' Convent opened. As I will discuss, the Velasco family became disenchanted with the petition process in Oaxaca, and it seems likely that her application to the Corpus Christi convent rather than the Cacicas' Convent was a result of their anger at being replaced by other *apoderados* in 1766.

theoretically prohibited from becoming priests, and although the Royal Decree of 1697 allowed their ordination, few seemed to have the social, financial, and educational resources needed to secure a place in a seminary for training – particularly in the face of continued Spanish and Creole prejudice against the intellectual and spiritual capacities of indigenous people. While many seminary and diocesan records from the colonial era are incomplete, scholars generally have concluded that indigenous men only amounted to 1-5% of the total number of priests in Mexico in the eighteenth century, with most agreeing that 1-2% was the most accurate estimate.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, historians like Margarita Menegus Bornemann and Matthew O'Hara have argued that these priests had a very limited impact on society; since they had to expend so much political capital to attain a position within the clergy, they rarely tried to undertake other initiatives. For example, Menengus states that in general, “indigenous clerics were associate pastors and helped Creole priests in Church labors,” and explained that “only with great difficulty did some manage to occupy...a position of sole authority over a designated parish.”<sup>39</sup>

The fact that several indigenous priests united in support of the Cacicas' convent, however, indicates that at least in Oaxaca, the indigenous clergy not only had influence to wield with the church hierarchy, but that they also had a certain level of ethnic pride and solidarity. Moreover, initial entry into religious orders seems to have paved the way for

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<sup>38</sup> Bornemann and Salvador, *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVIII*; Magnus Lundberg, “El Clero Indígena En Hispanoamérica: De La Legislación A La Implementación Y Práctica Eclesiástica,” *Estudios de Historia Novohispana*. 38 (January 2008): 59; O'Hara, *A Flock Divided*, 74; The numbers increased in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, as the Bourbon reforms pushed for more bilingual priests to be ordained. For example, in 1776 the bishop of Oaxaca designated 15 positions in the diocesan seminary for indigenous students to be trained as priests. See Francisco Canterla and Martín de Tovar, *La Iglesia de Oaxaca en el siglo XVIII* (Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1982), 195.

<sup>39</sup> Bornemann and Salvador, *Los indios, el sacerdocio y la Universidad en Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVIII*, 232.

other family members to follow. According to Ann Miriam Gallagher's study of the 143 nuns of Corpus Christi, ten (7%) had immediate family members among the clergy, and another twenty-five (17%) had distant relatives who were priests. Twenty (14%) of nuns were closely related, as either sisters, cousins, or aunts-nieces.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the nine priests who signed the convent petitions, at least one of the non-ordained caciques who signed the petition had a son who later became a priest.<sup>41</sup>

From the start, the petitioners declared that they sought to establish a convent for "thirty-three daughters of caciques."<sup>42</sup> Velasco and López went on to further specify that these women would be "descendants of indigenous people without mixture or infection from other groups" and that the convent would be for daughters of these same social classes.<sup>43</sup> The repeated references to the elite classes underline the fact that part of the caciques' motivation for founding the convent was maintaining their power over indigenous commoners. Moreover, the focus on ethnic purity served a dual purpose. Many of the challenges to cacique control of indigenous land came from mestizos

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<sup>40</sup> Gallagher, R. S. M., "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821," 160.

<sup>41</sup> Bachiller don Juan Ramos de Zárate was a diocesan priest and the son of don Juan Manuel de Zárate, a cacique from the village of Santa Lucía, who signed the 1753 petition. See *Venta de casa*, 10 April 1778, Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca, Obispado de Oaxaca, Leg 17, Exp 29. In the will of Juan Ángel de Velasco, he identifies himself as both a diocesan priest and the son of don Pedro Ángel de Velasco, a cacique. A man named Pedro Velasco did sign the 1766 petition, but he gave his hometown as San Pablo, whereas Juan Angel said his hometown was San Francisco Yovego. It is possible that they were father and son and simply were born in different villages, but probably more likely that these particular Velascos were not related. Will of Juan Ángel de Velasco, 1 October 1783, Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca, Obispado de Oaxaca, Leg 5, Exp 21.

<sup>42</sup> The limitation of the size of the convent to thirty-three nuns came from Capuchin rules, which specified this limitation so that the convent did not grow larger than the donations of the local population could realistically be able to support.

<sup>43</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco y Aguilar and don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, undated (circa 1742-1743), NL, Ayer MS 1144, 44. The specific phrase used is *descendientes de la gentilidad*. "Gentilidad" translates directly to "gentile," but was used in colonial New Spain to refer to indigenous people before the conquest, i.e. pagan people to whom news of Christianity had not yet arrived.

(people of Spanish and indigenous descent), who drew on their resources from both sides of their families to try to wrest power away from the caciques.

In describing themselves as pure-blooded, the caciques reinforced the differences between themselves and mestizos, and also invoked a common concept within Spanish legal and social norms. The purity of blood standard emerged as a result of Spanish discrimination against, and eventual expulsion of, Jewish people. To achieve important positions, Spaniards had to demonstrate that they did not have any Jewish ancestors, thereby proving their “purity of blood.” As María Elena Martínez has argued, this standard, particularly when used in the Americas, often reflected cultural identity rather than a strict genealogical definition.<sup>44</sup> In the eighteenth century, indigenous people also began to use this discourse when negotiating with colonial authorities. In doing so, according to Peter Villella, indigenous people “insisted that [their] own ancestors among the indigenous nobility of Mexico be remembered as the originators of an autochthonous, American strain of blood purity.”<sup>45</sup> Additionally, however, the caciques were complying with Spanish policy. In the 1697 Royal Decree that they cited, which gave permission for indigenous people to become priests, monks, or nuns, the King specifically prioritized the nobility, limiting positions of ecclesiastical authority to those who could demonstrate that they belonged to noble families.

After identifying the goal of their petition, Velasco and López offered several reasons why the convent should be built. First of all, they argued, it would be pleasing to

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<sup>44</sup> María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Peter B. Villella, “‘Pure and Noble Indians, Untainted by Inferior Idolatrous Races’: Native Elites and the Discourse of Blood Purity in Late Colonial Mexico,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (November 2011): 635, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-1416657>.

God and to the spiritual benefit of the diocese. Secondly, it would promote Catholicism among the indigenous people, instilling in them the hope that their daughters might be able to enter the convent. Finally, they pointed out that the indigenous people in the regions of Mexico City and Valladolid already had access to convents for their daughters. With a nod to local rivalries within New Spain, they pointed out that the “natives of this diocese should not be less attended than those of other dioceses.”<sup>46</sup> If their suggestion met with approval, they concluded, they asked the cabildo to undertake the next step: interviewing religious leaders to verify that a new convent would not be an undue burden on the town.

These were compelling arguments, well-grounded in an understanding of the colonial mentality of the times. The Spanish Empire was maintained through an intricate system of bureaucratic rules and legal codification, and by the late colonial period, Oaxacan indigenous elites had mastered the delicate art of delving deep into legal precedent to prove their case while still demonstrating appropriate levels of respect and honor towards authorities. In order to prove the acceptability of a convent for indigenous women, they referenced not only the 1697 Royal Decree, but also the date when this decree was officially promulgated in Mexico (July 1698). They noted that they directed their petition to the bishop (or in this case, the diocesan cabildo) because he was the only one allowed to grant permission for a new convent, mentioning both the Council of Trent and the Mexican Council as the sources of this law. Finally, they supported their claim that the convent would be to the spiritual benefit to the city by referencing Thomas Aquinas as one of many doctors of the Church who wrote that the existence of convents

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<sup>46</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco and don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, undated (circa 1742-1743), NL, Ayer MS 1144, 46.

pleased God. Clearly, Velasco and López were conversant with many of the legal and ecclesiastic documents that governed local Church decisions, and knew how to deploy them in favor of their proposal.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, the idea that the convent would benefit the entire diocese, and not just the indigenous population, was a strategic appeal to local pride; in colonial New Spain, convents often served as cultural markers of a city's power and social importance. Historian Margaret Chowning has described some of the reasons why the Creole residents of San Miguel el Grande wanted to build a convent in 1754: It would "be an architectural ornament to the town center, ...symbolize the piety that was a major part of the town's identity, and put San Miguel in the same category as nearby rival Querétaro -- provincial towns important enough to support large female convents."<sup>48</sup> Establishing a convent proved that a city, or its inhabitants, had the financial and social capital to support an institution that was, in terms of basic survival, a luxury. Only towns with a certain amount of wealth and level of generosity could adequately provide for the needs of women who relied on charity for their daily sustenance. Moreover, Antequera was a place in particular need of God's blessing and protection, the type that might be given if there were more convents in the city. Located along an active fault line, Antequera had suffered from earthquakes for centuries, but local authorities were certain that they had noticed a decline in the number and intensity of earthquakes since more convents had been built in the city. Perhaps one more convent, especially one with such a unique

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<sup>47</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco and don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, undated (circa 1742-1743), NL, Ayer MS 1144, 44-47.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Chowning, *Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752-1863* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9.

mission, would be enough to evert God's wrath, expressed through natural disasters, entirely.<sup>49</sup>

The accumulation of these various arguments seemed to be successful; the Oaxacan cabildo responded with interest to this proposal and began sending out inquiries for responses from the leaders and administrators of local monasteries and convents. Altogether, they gathered letters of support for the project from ten people over a span of four months: the director and abbess of the convent of San José, the existing Capuchin convent for Spanish and Creole women, as well as the priors of the monasteries of Santo Domingo, San Francisco, and Nuestra Señora del Carmen, and two administrators from the monastery of San Agustín (the prior and the financial director). Unlike the cabildo's previous effort to establish a Capuchin convent, when they sent out a standard six-question survey to religious leaders in the city, in this case they didn't list any specific questions, but simply allowed the convent administrators to respond as they chose. The answers given varied, therefore, between a single paragraphs and pages of theological argumentation and analysis, but all approved of the potential new establishment.

Despite the overall positive tone of the responses, the diocesan financial officer, Ignacio Moreno Reyna, had concerns about the funding for the convent. In particular, he was worried about how the city would support two Capuchin convents, the one that had just been built for Spanish and Creole women plus the proposed convent for indigenous women. (Capuchin convents faced particular financial challenges because they did not require women to pay a dowry before entering, and so were entirely dependent on donations.) This fear seems to have ignored the fact that indigenous communities had

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<sup>49</sup> Fray Carlos de Almodovar, letter to the Cabildo of Oaxaca, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 69.

been supporting their own fraternities and parochial celebrations for quite some time. One small fraternity in a local Mixtec village, for example, was funded by the earnings of nearly 2,000 heads of small livestock. In general, conflicts over funding between the Church and local fraternities usually revolved around the question of how to appropriately spend money, not the lack of funds.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, to avoid one convent being left without funds, Moreno proposed a plan: that the donations for both convents go into the hands of the cabildo, who would then divide them between each one. On November 26, 1744, the cabildo approved this plan. “Although the generosity and pious zeal of the caciques assures us that they will continue to support both convents with equal care,” they explained “...we believe that the donations that are gathered should be divided between both convents.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, indigenous funds would be partially redistributed to institutions for Spanish women.

Moreover, based on Moreno’s recommendation, the cabildo also required the caciques to select a site where the convent should be built. Then, the cabildo would send a specialist to analyze the location and determine the cost of constructing a convent there. At its most costly, this could entail building both the convent building as well as an adjoining church, so that the nuns would not have to leave their enclosure to attend Mass. Even if the caciques selected a site where a church was already located, however, they would have to pay for the renovations in order to connect the new convent onto the existing church. Once all the cost analysis was completed, Moreno stipulated that the caciques would have to demonstrate that they had already collected funds equal to the

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<sup>50</sup> María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi, *El sol y la cruz: los pueblos indios de Oaxaca colonial* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1996), 227–30.

<sup>51</sup> Declaration of the Cabildo, 4 August 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 91. I have not been able to confirm if this funding practice was put into place.

cost of the convent construction. While proving financial feasibility was an important step in gaining approval for a convent, it was unusual to require the full funding for the project be put forward before the bishop's initial approval was granted.

When the caciques were informed of this decision, they responded with anger and frustration, expressed through legal opposition. They filed an appeal with the diocese, called a *recurso de apelación*, asking the bishop himself, as Moreno's superior, to intervene. They argued that the financial officer could not create additional barriers to the construction of a convent, such as the request to provide the entirety of the funding before the convent was even approved. Faced with the threat of further legal battle, Moreno seemed to have retracted his earlier position, explaining that this project had emerged out of the "voluntary piety and work of the caciques, and to make it contentious at this point, would put a damper on their religious fervor."<sup>52</sup> He noted that since all of the decisions had been internal so far, there would be no public scandal if the cabildo reversed its decision and ceased to require the funding and location selection plans.

The newly-installed bishop, however, Diego Felipe Gómez de Angulo, refused to give in as quickly as Moreno had. Born in Burgos, Spain, Gómez had studied at the University of Salamanca before being sent to Mexico, where he was first stationed in Puebla, Mexico. He was installed as bishop of Oaxaca on December 12, 1744.<sup>53</sup> An intellectual, he placed a great deal of emphasis on the proper formation of the laity, and believed that catechetical instruction had to be accompanied by lessons in Spanish, rather than relying on indigenous languages to convey Catholic doctrine.<sup>54</sup> Gómez mistrusted

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<sup>52</sup> Statement of Ignacio Moreno Reyna, 6 April 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 98-98r.

<sup>53</sup> Canterla and Tovar, *La Iglesia de Oaxaca en el siglo XVIII*, 95.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750–1850* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 107.

the caciques' actions from the start. As part of the legal back-and-forth over Moreno's plan and the caciques' threat to file an appeal, he requested that they submit the full text of the 1697 Royal Decree that they had cited in order to claim that indigenous women could become nuns. After they did so, he reviewed the document and, in a one-paragraph decree, threw cold water on the entire project. "This decree," he stated, "only enables Indian women to become nuns, and does not enable Indians to be able to establish religious foundations."<sup>55</sup> Although negative, Gómez's response did highlight the unusual nature of the caciques' petition: by mobilizing for a convent for indigenous people themselves, rather than accepting one as a demonstration of elite Creole largesse, the caciques were doing something new and different.

In response, the caciques tried once again to convince Gómez of the benefits of the convent, arguing that it would improve the level of religious education across the diocese, and encourage indigenous people to become more involved with the Catholic faith. They also reassured him that they understood that they would need the viceroy's approval as well, citing documents governing the foundation of a convent in Mexico, which specified that local groups must obtain the bishop's approval before final approval from the viceroy would be given. They concluded with a warning of the consequences of rejecting their proposal: the Indians, they argued, would start to say amongst themselves, "If we are denied in a case so dedicated to the service of God, how will we not be neglected in any other area?" This line of thinking, Velasco and Chávez argued, would be "gravely harmful to the Christian Republic of Indians."<sup>56</sup> Moreover, they filled their

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<sup>55</sup> Declaration of Bishop Diego Felipe Gómez de Angulo, 19 October 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 108r.

<sup>56</sup> Petition of don Manuel de Velasco y Aguilar and don Joseph López de Chávez, 30 October 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 125.

sixteen-page petition, one of the longest indigenous-authored documents in the entire collection, with a summary of the arguments they had already presented, being careful to quote directly from Royal Decrees and church teachings in support of their position.

Gómez, however, remained unmoved. He believed that in order to be allowed to establish a convent, the caciques would have to obtain permission directly from the viceroy of Mexico. Only after they had received the viceroy's approval, Gómez stated, would he even review the convent petitions and decide whether to accept or reject the plan. In a classic move of Bourbon Mexican politics, Gómez used bureaucratic stalling to essentially deny the petition, ordering that the paperwork be shelved until the "petitioners had fulfilled what the Royal Law requires, and then His Illustrious Honor [the bishop, referring to himself in the third person] will, for his part, comply with what the King orders."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the bishop refused to remove the conditions that Moreno had originally suggested, that the caciques had to choose a site and collect all the funds necessary to transform their selected location into an operational convent. The last documents from this section are the orders to return the completed dossier back to the caciques, presumably so that they could file their petition with the viceroy. However, no further action seems to have been taken, at least none that entered into the documentary record, until 1753.

### **Second attempt: 1753-1754**

Rather than continuing to fight Gómez, the caciques waited for a more auspicious moment to continue on with their project. It came in 1753, when the diocese of Oaxaca was once again governed by the cabildo after Gómez's death in July of 1752. In fact, 154

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<sup>57</sup> Decree of Diego Felipe Gómez de Angulo, 30 October 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 129r.

caciques and other leaders gathered in support of the project on September 6, 1753, just a few weeks before the new bishop of Oaxaca, Buenaventura Blanco y Helguero, would be installed. This time, however, they seemed to take Gómez and Madero's original advice. Instead of directly petitioning the bishop for approval of the convent, they gathered together to declare their financial support for the convent, obligating themselves to contribute to the construction of the project, "once the Royal License is given by his Majesty...until everything is declared satisfactory by experts."<sup>58</sup> Although the caciques still did not identify a specific site for the location of the convent, they demonstrated their commitment to fundraising for the project, and agreed that diocesan officials could examine the future site and assess the cost of the construction.

Rather than submitting this documentation to the diocese of Oaxaca, however, the caciques moved to petition the viceroy, Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas, asking him to give his permission to represent their case to the King, Ferdinand VI. Juan de Velasco, who had signed the 1742 petition as a church musician in Oaxaca, spearheaded the petition in Mexico City, as he had become an organist in the Mexico City Cathedral in the interim. He acknowledged the complications introduced by Gómez, explaining to the viceroy that the bishop of Oaxaca was under the impression that indigenous people would have to get special permission directly from the King in order to be able to establish convents by themselves. As soon as this permission was acquired, he argued, the caciques would be ready to contribute with their promised donations, the bishop would give his blessing, and "many" indigenous people from around the diocese would be willing to contribute either resources or labor in order to help build the convent. In

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<sup>58</sup> Petition of don Vincente de Velasco et al, 6 September 1753, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 142.

fact, Velasco concluded, there would be so many people to work on the construction of the convent that each person would only have to work a few days per year on the project, an obligation that would be almost unnoticeable.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately for Velasco, his argument that work on the convent would be only a minor imposition on the lives of the indigenous people in the diocese was an immediate red flag for the viceroy. Although Velasco himself had not used this word, Güemes y Horcasitas called the fundraising system he had proposed a type of *repartamiento*, or forced labor. The Spanish colonial system relied on a careful distribution of the benefits of forced indigenous labor and other economic contributions, which attempted to satisfy the demands of the Crown, Church, and individual Spanish colonizers for wealth without being so severe as to provoke revolt. Adding another demand to this artfully constructed balance of obligations, especially one that would not benefit any of the aforementioned three groups, could easily upset the apple cart without any benefit to the viceroy. In response to Velasco's petition, Güemes made two contradictory statements. He first emphasized that the contributions had to be voluntary: "Note that although it be for such a pious project, it is prohibited to compel anyone to contribute, even just with their personal service. Only those who voluntarily wish to contribute may do so."<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, despite the fact that he didn't want donations to the convent to be required, he did want them to be concrete and certain. He asked Velasco if he could provide assurance that the convent would be fully funded. As evidence, Velasco then submitted the

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<sup>59</sup> Don Juan de Velasco, letter to viceroy Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas, 19 February 1753, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 135.

<sup>60</sup> Declaration of Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas, 27 March 1754, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 135r.

document signed by 154 men a few months earlier, wherein they voluntarily pledged to financially support the convent.

Even this promise was not enough to convince Güemes. With his objections regarding finances presumably settled, Güemes then decided against supporting the project based on the irregularities regarding the petition itself. Bishop Gómez' unwillingness to support the convent proved to be a major blockade, even after his death. After examining Velasco's petition and the financial promises made by the caciques, Güemes asked why the convent proposal was so incomplete. Where was the evidence demonstrating the necessity of the convent? Where were the testimonies from the leaders of other religious foundations in the city, affirming that the new convent would not threaten their own sources of donations? Where was the approval from the bishop? Güemes concluded that this petition did not conform to the proscribed "form, style, or practice of similar projects," and sent the whole thing back to Antequera for the newly-appointed bishop, Buenaventura Blanco y Helguero, to review and complete.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately for the caciques, Blanco y Helguero had a very similar background and perspective as Gómez. He too was a Spaniard through and through: born in Valladolid and educated in Alcalá, the hometown of Cervantes.<sup>62</sup> Like Gómez, his time as bishop was marked by his emphasis on the use and teaching of Spanish over indigenous languages.<sup>63</sup> Once again, the petition languished in the diocesan offices.

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<sup>61</sup> Declaration of Juan Francisco de Güemes y Horcasitas, 6 July 1754, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 147r.

<sup>62</sup> *Diccionario geográfico-histórico de las Indias Occidentales ó América: es a saber: de los reynos del Perú, Nueva España, Tierra Firme, Chile, y Nuevo reyno de Granada*, Vol 2 (Madrid: en la imprenta de Manuel González, 1787), 357.

<sup>63</sup> Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*, 107–8.

## 1766

A new window of opportunity opened in the mid-1760s, after the death of Blanco y Helguero in May of 1764. This time, however, the caciques waited for a little over a year after the new bishop, Miguel Anselmo Álvarez de Abreu y Valdéz, had been installed in April, 1765. In August of 1766, over three hundred indigenous men gathered outside the church of the Preciosísima Sangre (Most Sacred Blood), located on one of Antequera's main streets between the large monastery of Santo Domingo, the first and largest Dominican monastery in Oaxaca, and the central town square flanked by the cathedral and town hall. Their purposes, they stated, was to reinvigorate the campaign for a convent for indigenous women. They quickly demonstrated that they had overcome the two biggest blockades to the project. With the permission of doña Petrona Latatua, whose deceased husband had donated a substantial amount for the maintenance of the Preciosísima Sangre church, they proposed that the convent be built next to this church, resolving the question of the convent location. Moreover, the indigenous men brought with them some initial monetary donations for the convent project, carefully specifying that these were "purely voluntary contributions, not being forced by *repartimiento*, quota, or any other system." A note from a scribe on the margins of this document underscores the impact that this initial donation had: "The natives offer to contribute with voluntary alms" he wrote next to their statement, as if to make sure that this point caught the attention of colonial officials. Further down the page, the scribe recorded that the donations gathered amounted to 388 pesos, the equivalent of a dowry for a middle-class woman, or a few years' worth of mortgage payments on a small house.<sup>64</sup> It seems

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<sup>64</sup> Petition of the caciques, 3 August 1766, AGI, Mexico, 2661, segundo cuaderno, 8r.

probable that this donation was equal parts practical and symbolic. With nearly 300 men gathering that day, likely a few gave larger amounts while the majority donated a single peso as a gesture of their personal involvement with the project.

In comparison with the caciques involved in the 1744 and 1753 petitions, the demographics of this group had changed significantly, shifting away from Antequera and broadening to include various levels of social identity. From the very start, the caciques had used a fairly open-ended definition of the elite classes, asking for the convent to be built for the daughters of the “caciques and principals and lesser principals of the region.” The 1766 mobilization, however, stretched even this definition to the limits. Whereas the 1742 signers of the petition had all identified themselves as either caciques or governors, the two highest positions within colonial indigenous political structures, only twenty-five (7%) of the 1766 signatories belonged to those categories. In fact, over half of the representatives were either *alcaldes* (101, 30%) or *regidores* (109, 33%) both elected positions, although still part of the native hierarchy. Only two priests, along with a lowly subdeacon, signed the 1766 petition. Notably, the 1766 petition also included for the first time a category called *señorio*, meaning landowner. While owning land did signify a certain amount of wealth and power, it seems unlikely that an indigenous person whose highest title was “landowner” would be able to demonstrate the same type of “purity of blood” and noble ascendancy as the original group of caciques in 1742. Moreover, the extent of the geographic coverage grew: representatives from as far away as Huitzo, a full day’s walk away from Antequera, and Santiago Lalopa, from the farthest regions of the Villa Alta district, were present at Preciosísima Sangre. While petitioners from Antequera itself continued to participate in the project, their numbers shrank as a percentage of the

overall total.<sup>65</sup> Despite the differences in the 1766 mobilization versus the earlier petition, one thing did remain constant: the multi-ethnic nature of the caciques' coalition. About 60% of the caciques generally came from Zapotec regions, another 10-15% from Mixtec areas, and a similar number from areas that were inhabited by multiple indigenous groups, with Nahuatl petitioners forming the final 1-2%. These proportions remained relatively stable across all three rounds of petitioning (see figure 1 and figure 2).

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<sup>65</sup> Testimonio, 3 August 1766, AGI, Mexico, 2661, segundo cuaderno, 1-7r.

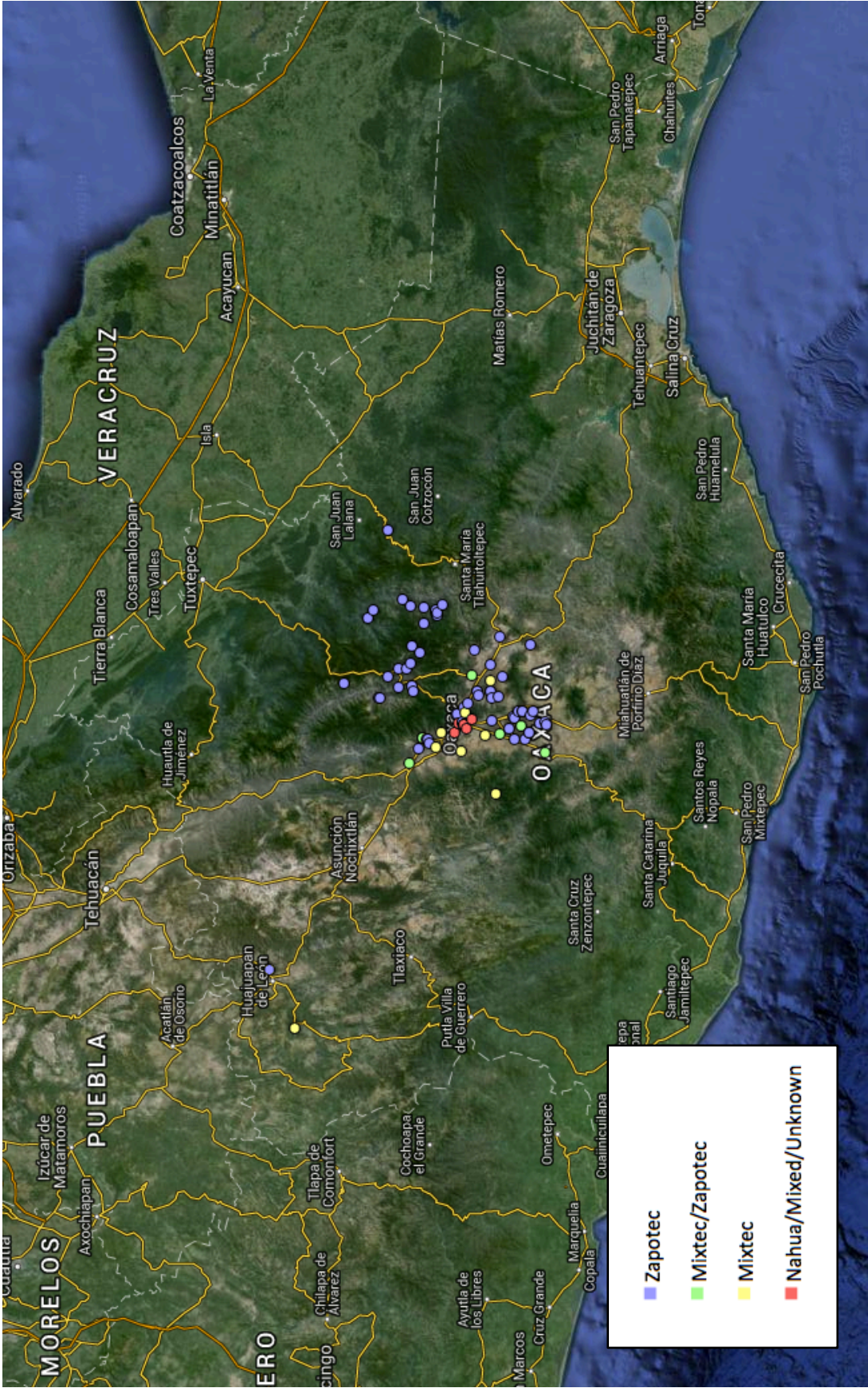
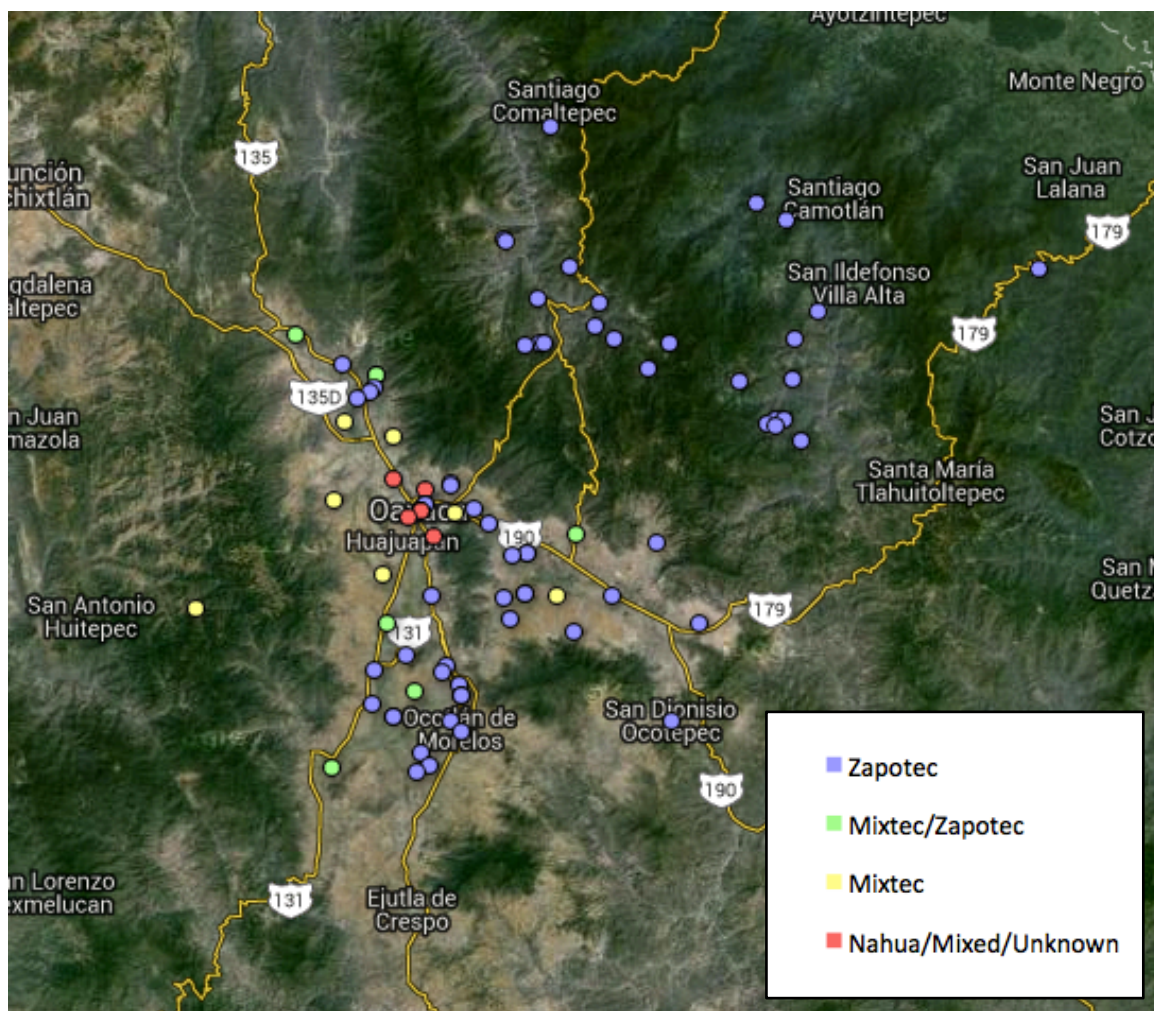


Figure 1: Map of villages and ethnicities represented in the 1766 petition

**Fig 2: Close-up of central Oaxacan villages and ethnicities in the 1766 petition**



The 1766 petitioners introduced another major shift in the petition process: they withdrew their transfer of legal power from the caciques Velasco and Chávez and placed it instead in the hands of Juan Alejandro de Miranda, a diocesan lawyer, and Juan Joseph Quintana, a priest. Neither one was indigenous. In the transfer document, the indigenous petitioners wanted to change their approach in campaigning for the convent and “renew their attempts with more efficiency,” given that the “the process has been suspended for more than twelve years.”<sup>66</sup>

A few years later, Velasco y Aguilar, along with his cousins the cacique-priests don Juan de Velasco and don Vincente de Velasco y Victoria, complained in a letter to the bishop that he didn’t trust these “new” indigenous leaders who had accepted non-indigenous people as intermediaries. In fact, he described them as upstarts, who had been allured by the hope of social mobility, and impudently placed total control of the project in the hands of Spaniards.<sup>67</sup> The emerging leadership of the 1766 coalition, however, had similar connections to the indigenous community as Velasco y Aguilar himself. In fact, two of the men who were in charge of collecting the donations, don Pascual de los Reyes y Roldan and don José Ramírez, were caciques and residents of Antequera who had signed the 1753 petition with Velasco. The two other caciques who helped collect donations, don Isidro Flores and don Juan Pedro Abedaño, also lived in Antequera and had obtained high positions within Spanish colonial society: Flores was a university graduate, while Abedaño, who would later become a spokesperson for the indigenous coalition as well, was a diocesan priest.

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<sup>66</sup> Testimonio, 3 August 1766, AGI, Mexico, 2661, segundo cuaderno 7r.

<sup>67</sup> Petition of Juan de Velasco et al, 6 September 1753, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 137-143r; don Manuel Velasco, don Vicente Velasco, and don Manuel Velasco de Aguilar, letter to the Fiscal of New Spain, 27 June 1769, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 158.

Contrary to Velasco's complaints, therefore, the shift in leadership seemed less about a change in the ethnic identity of the caciques, and more of a pragmatic decision to involve Spaniards in an effort to pursue the project more effectively. Miranda and Quintana, for their part, were not chosen at random from the Creole and Spanish elite; rather, each one brought specific benefits to the campaign for the convent. A schoolteacher before he became a canon lawyer, Miranda was quite familiar with indigenous practices, particularly within the Zapotec region of Villa Alta. He frequently represented indigenous groups in legal cases against individuals, most often when there was a conflict over rights and privileges accorded to hereditary roles. As he would go on to do in the convent proposal, in those court cases he spoke on behalf of the local villages, invoking the "practices and customs" of "our town" when defending, for example, the village of San Juan de Yaviche – despite the fact he himself that had been born in Mexico City to parents of European descent, and there is no indication that he had any ancestral connection to indigenous Oaxacans.<sup>68</sup> Juan Joseph de Quintana and Latatua, although descended from a long line of elite Creoles, also spoke Zapotec, and used it on a regular basis both to hear confessions and to give sermons in his role as a priest.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Quintana had important connections to the Church of the Preciosísima Sangre. He was a descendent of don Lorenzo de Olivera y Ávila, who had built the church and named it as one of the primary beneficiaries of his estate in his will. Quintana's mother, doña Petrona Latatua, had inherited the responsibility of overseeing this *obra pia* (charitable work), which provided an annual sum of money to the church, in perpetuity,

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<sup>68</sup> Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 177. Merits of José Alejandro de Miranda, 1750, AGI, Indiferente 235, N. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Merits of Juan José de Quintana y Latatua, 1758, AGI, Indiferente 236, N. 38.

as long as certain prayers and acts of mercy were performed. Moreover, Quintana was the head of the confraternity established at the church.<sup>70</sup> Presumably, the indigenous coalition hoped that by involving Quintana in their petition, the legal matters surrounding the addition of a convent onto an existing church building would be smoothed over.

Miranda and Quintana immediately began gathering documentation in order to demonstrate that the church of the Preciosísima Sangre was available to be transformed into a convent church. They examined the will of don Lorenzo de Olivera y Ávila, paying special attention to the conditions of his donation. He had specified that the Eucharist must be perpetually venerated in the church, that the ground around the church must be used for the burial of poor people who could not afford other locations, and that the altar area must be used for the interment of himself and his own family members after death. Doña Latatua, the administrator, testified that the estate was no longer able to provide income to support these three conditions, and settled on a measure that could satisfy all parties: she would sell a few houses, which were part of the estate and lay contiguous to the church, to the indigenous coalition for use as a convent. With just a bit of renovation, the houses could be converted into a convent; the nuns could help ensure the perpetual veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, and the money from the sale of the house could help provide for the burial costs for the poor. Miranda and Quintana interviewed all the other possible heirs to the estate, who agreed to this plan and renounced any possible claim to the houses.

With this evidence complete, in March of 1767 Miranda and Quintana filed a new petition with the diocese on behalf of the caciques. Their arguments echoed the caciques'

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<sup>70</sup> List of Members of the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, 1752, Archivo General del Poder Ejecutivo de Oaxaca, Obispado de Oaxaca, Leg 4, Exp 22.

rhetoric in previous petitions, stating that this project would glorify God and ensure that the indigenous people of Oaxaca had a spiritual asylum similar to those of Mexico City and Valladolid. They straightforwardly addressed the opposition that the caciques had encountered, commenting that the financial administrator under Bishop Gómez had raised objections to the project, and that previous attempts to gain the approval of the viceroy had been unsuccessful. However, they believed that the use of the church of the Preciosísima Sangre would resolve all of these issues. Moreover, they noted that the indigenous contributors' generosity had continued beyond the 388 pesos collected in August, 1766; in the past six months, the donations had amounted to nearly two thousand pesos. Notably, Miranda and Quintana were the first ones to suggest that the founding nuns for the Cacicas' Convent should come from the Corpus Christi convent, ensuring that no Creole or Spanish women would be placed in a position of authority in the new foundation.<sup>71</sup>

Now that the question of both funding and location was resolved, and the petition was shepherded by Creole elites, the case quickly advanced through the various levels of bureaucracy, receiving the bishop's approval on March 23, 1767, the viceroy's approval on September 24, 1767, and King Carlos III's Royal Approval on February 10, 1768.<sup>72</sup> The decision arrived in Oaxaca in May of that year, and perhaps after a bit of heel-dragging, the bishop, don Miguel Anselmo Álvarez de Abreu y Valdés circulated the news in his October *cordilleras*, a type of pastoral letter sent to all the priests in the diocese, asking them to invite all interested indigenous people to a meeting in Antequera

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<sup>71</sup> Manuel Caro del Castillo, letter to the Viceroy, 1 June 1767, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 149.

<sup>72</sup> Approval of don Miguel Anselmo Albares de Abreu y Valdes, 23 March 1767, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 254-260; Recommendation of the Marques de Croix, 24 September 1767, AGI, Mexico, 2661; Royal Decree, 10 February 1768, AGI, Mexico 2661.

on October 24 to hear the reading of the Royal Decree.<sup>73</sup> The meeting was postponed for two more days, supposedly due to the bishop's unexpectedly full schedule, but on October 26, a "large number" of indigenous "governors, alcaldes, and representatives of their Republic" gathered in one of the rooms in the bishop's episcopal palace, where the Royal Decree granting them permission to found a convent was read out loud to them. In response, don Juan Pedro Abendaño stepped forward to represent the indigenous coalition in giving thanks. The summary of the meeting, created for the king's historical records, reported Abendaño as saying that "in his name, and in the name of the other Natives of his Nation, he obeyed and would obey devotedly the order and resolution of His Majesty, giving his Royal Highness, due thanks for the sovereign favor and grace that his Royal Magnificence had conceded to give them the license for the convent of Capuchin nuns that they had so desired."<sup>74</sup> Notably, while Miranda and Quintana may have been handling the legal prosecution of the convent process, an indigenous man still represented the group in thanking the king.

Carlos III's permission, however, came with some limitations. Although he approved of the project overall, he specified that the daughters and relatives of the original petitioners should not be given priority in their application to enter the convent, contrary to what Velasco and López had originally asked for in 1743. Instead, the king decreed, the convent must be open to all indigenous elite women, regardless of their connections to the petitioners. Moreover, the convent would be barred from accepting any monetary gifts that were tied to the admittance of a particular woman; although the Capuchin order did not ask for dowries from potential nuns, the king wanted to make sure

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<sup>73</sup> Royal Decree, 7 October 1768, AGI, Mexico 2661.

<sup>74</sup> Meeting records, 26-27 October 1768, AGI, Mexico 2661.

that no favoritism was extended to the wealthy, and that poor indigenous women had equal opportunity to enter (as long, of course, as they could demonstrate they were descendants of nobility). Moreover, Carlos III placed two conditions on his approval. The first was that the indigenous petitioners had to find a different site than the Church of the Preciosísima Sangre. Although he accepted the validity of the transfer from doña Latatua, he believed that the three conditions of the *obra pia*, which had to remain in vigor, were incompatible with the life of a convent. The requirement that poor people be buried on the church grounds particularly bothered him; he thought the funerals would disturb the peace of the nuns. Once a different site was chosen, the king ordered, the indigenous coalition had to demonstrate that they had accumulated sufficient funds to transform that location into a convent. After reading the letter, the bishop appointed an overseer to begin collecting funds and searching for a new location. Manuel de Velasco, despite having been pushed aside by the new coalition's representatives the year before, was in attendance at this meeting, and came forward to acknowledge that he had already gathered donations from several people. He asked for a few months to get his accounts in order before he would transfer his money to the designated diocesan official.<sup>75</sup>

The king's refusal to allow the Church of the Preciosísima Sangre to be used was, according to Miranda and Quintana, a major setback. They wrote a letter in which the "noble Indians, known as caciques," purportedly spoke directly to Carlos III, although Miranda was the only person whose signature appeared at the end of the letter. The letter explained that while the indigenous coalition was happy to receive the King's approval to the overall project, they were "dismayed" at his rejection of the Preciosísima Sangre site.

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<sup>75</sup> Royal Decree, 10 February 1768, AGI, Mexico 2661; Meeting records, 26-27 October 1768, AGI, Mexico 2661.

The “poor Indians,” they explained, although enthusiastic about the project and willing to contribute financially, could only afford to build the convent if it were attached to an existing church. They painted a sad picture of what would happen if the caciques were forced to find another location: the expenses of purchasing land, building a church, and constructing a convent would overwhelm the generosity of the indigenous people; the project that they had so longed-for would languish, incomplete; and the cacas of the diocese would be left without a spiritual asylum.<sup>76</sup>

Luckily, another donor came forward with an offer to have the convent be located in the church of the Siete Príncipes [Seven Princes, a reference to the seven choirs of angels]. This church had only recently been constructed in one of the outlying neighborhoods of Antequera, and quickly received approval as a location from the bishop.<sup>77</sup> Velasco, in his opposition to the new direction of the project overall, strongly disapproved of this new location. He described Siete Príncipes as located “almost outside the capital, in a neighborhood where there are scarcely any houses save for a few inhabited by poor people and commoners, bringing with it a high risk of robbery.”<sup>78</sup> He offered a counter-proposal: the church of Nuestra Señora del Patrocinio [Patronage of Mary], located a few blocks northeast of Santo Domingo. Diocesan officials did in fact evaluate this site, but quickly dismissed it, arguing that adding a convent to this church would require re-routing some city streets, hindering the flow of transit. In contrast, the

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph de Miranda, letter to Carlos III, 18 March 1769, AGI, Mexico 2661. The date for the letter was added in a different hand and probably reflects the date that the letter was received in Madrid. By February of 1769 another location for the convent had already been found.

<sup>77</sup> Order of Bishop Miguel Anselmo Alvarez de Aberu y Valdez, 6 February 1769, AGI, Mexico 2661.

<sup>78</sup> Don Manuel and don Vicente Velasco y Victoria, and don Manuel Velasco de Aguilar, letter to the Fiscal of New Spain, 27 June 1769, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 60v.

land surrounding Siete Príncipes church was free and open for new construction, and the location's closeness to the river would allow fresh air to circulate around the convent.<sup>79</sup>

Reading between the lines, it seems that the rustic setting of the church of the Siete Príncipes seemed to be exactly what compelled Spanish city officials to propose it as the location for the convent. The neighborhood, according to historian Rogelio Aguilar Aguilar, was “inhabited almost completely by indigenous groups.”<sup>80</sup> Architect and historian Carlos Lira Vásquez described the neighborhood as “located within the rectangular grid that defined the city, [but with] more of a rural image rather than urban.”<sup>81</sup> While it may have been technically part of the city, Siete Príncipes was clearly in a “wild” neighborhood, surrounded by Indian houses, the river, and open spaces, rather than urban dwellings and the churches, government buildings, and businesses that defined most of Oaxaca's city center. Although named in honor of the seven choirs of angels, the church also housed a strong devotion to St. Joseph the Worker, perhaps a reflection of the working-class ethos of the neighborhood. One Oaxacan resident, reminiscing about his childhood, remembered the festivities, carried out by residents of the neighborhood, that took place on principal feast days of the church. In his memoir, Juan Bautista Carriedo described the festivals as scenes of disorder, chaos, and gluttony; to him, the celebrations were evidence of the uncivilized nature of the Indians. “The pagan Indians,” as he labeled them, implying that they had not truly converted to Christianity, “took the lead in these celebrations, and with their...poorly made

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<sup>79</sup> Diligencia, 9 February 1769, AGI, Mexico 2661.

<sup>80</sup> Rogelio Aguilar Aguilar, *Cronicas de la casa de cultura Oaxaqueña* (Oaxaca: Casa de la Cultura Oaxaqueña, 2007), 13.

<sup>81</sup> Carlos Lira Vásquez, *Arquitectura y sociedad: Oaxaca rumbo a la modernidad, 1790-1920* (Tlalpan, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2008), 28.

adornments, their dirty and torn clothing and their discordant bugles and raucous drums, created a terrible and disagreeable noise.”<sup>82</sup> The streets surrounding Siete Príncipes, according to Carriedo, were imbued with the untamed wildness of Indian celebrations.

In the end, Velasco may have been right to be worried about the location of the convent. The proximity of Siete Príncipes to the Atoyac river exposed the nuns to damp and unhealthy winds, and sullied their drinking water.<sup>83</sup> In fact, one of the more expensive aspects of building the convent was laying new pipes to transport drinking water; ironically, the project ended up connecting to a water source located near the church of the Preciosísima Sangre. Additionally, the convent's location relative to the other Capuchin convent in the city, the convent of San José in the northern quadrant of Antequera, led to nicknames that reflected both the geographic and social orientation of the two convents: the Spanish Capuchin convent was frequently called the convent of the Capuchinas Altas [Upper Capuchins], while the Cacicas' convent was sometimes called the Capuchinas Bajas [Lower Capuchins]. A similar type of designation had already been in use for the two churches named after Our Lady of Mount Carmel: Carmen Alto became the name of the church attended by high-ranking elite Creoles, while the parish attended by indigenous people, located in the southwestern part of the city, Carmen Bajo, was an indigenous parish. While these descriptors corresponded with geographic location, they also communicated the racial hierarchies of the city: the cacicas seemed destined to remain below their Spanish contemporaries.

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<sup>82</sup> Juan Bautista Carriedo, *Estudios, históricos y estadísticos, del departamento de Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Impr. Del autor [self-published], 1847), 123.

<sup>83</sup> Testamento de don José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, 19 April 1794, AHNO, Joseph Álvarez, 74:54-63.

Nevertheless, the new indigenous coalition apparently accepted the donation from Murillo, perhaps believing that moving forward on any site approved by the bishop was better than continuing what was now a thirty-five year fight. Construction on the new convent soon began. By 1775, the erection of the convent building was more than halfway complete, and both the king and the pope, Sextus VI, gave permission for a small group of nuns to travel from the Corpus Christi convent in Mexico City to Oaxaca, to serve as the foundresses of the Cacicas' Convent. On February 24, 1782, Madre María Theodora de San Agustín, along with five other nuns, arrived in Oaxaca for the official inauguration of the convent.

### **Gender and the Foundation of the Cacicas' Convent**

Since the caciques' project was designated specifically for women, underlying perspectives on gender became an important part of the discussion surrounding the proposed convent. As Matthew O'Hara has pointed out, the very selection of a convent as a method of demonstrating indigenous piety and Catholicism reflected colonial Spanish gender norms.<sup>84</sup> The project involved collaboration between mostly male authority figures: the caciques on one side and priests, bishops, and political leaders on the other. Although the convent represented a promise for increased social standing for indigenous women, it was one that offered little threat to Spanish and Creole men; nuns would never compete with the established authority of colonial leaders. As we have seen, schools and convents for indigenous women had already been established in Mexico City and Valladolid, but a campaign in Mexico City to create a seminary for indigenous men was unsuccessful. In many ways, a seminary and a convent for indigenous people had similar

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<sup>84</sup> Francisco Canterla and Martin de Tovar, *La Iglesia de Oaxaca en el siglo XVIII* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1982), 95.

ramifications: they were a visible reminder within the urban cityscape of the Catholicism, wealth, and intellectual capability of indigenous peoples. The gendered nature of the convent, however, made it more acceptable to colonial officials, who welcomed the opportunity to participate in a plan that would help protect women and advance feminized spirituality among indigenous people.

Many of the Creole supporters of the convent focused on the supposedly inherent traits of indigenous women that made them suitable to become nuns: their humility, docility, and desire to be completely united to Christ through the spousal vows of religious life.<sup>85</sup> As the first abbess of Corpus Christi, a Creole woman named Madre María Ángela, wrote: “If our Father Saint Francis had known the Indians...He would have encountered in these docile women the softness of wax, poverty befitting a hermit, humility... and acceptance of privations.”<sup>86</sup> Miranda and Quintana wrote in 1767 that the indigenous women of Oaxaca had been in need of a convent for many years: Many women, they explained, although ready to serve God and well-prepared to become nuns, “but lacking the spiritual asylum of a convent...have been forced to marry.”<sup>87</sup> In other words, they argued that these women were already completely suited to dedicate themselves to religious life, but simply lacked a convent where they were allowed to enter.

The two female respondents to the survey, the abbess of the Corpus Christi convent and the abbess of the Capuchin convent of San José in Oaxaca, both emphasized

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<sup>85</sup> Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Fray Carlos de Almodovar, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 65r-66.

<sup>87</sup> Petition of Joseph Alejandro de Miranda and Juan Joseph Quintana to the Bishop of Oaxaca, 17 March 1767, NL, MS 1144, 248r-249.

indigenous women's desire to become nuns. Madre María Ángela, the Creole abbess of Corpus Christi, explained that she supported the project for a convent in Oaxaca because so many “humble indigenous women [*inditas*]” had arrived at Corpus Christi seeking to be allowed to entered, but were barred for lack of space. These “sad” women, she explained, although called to religious life, were forced to return to Oaxaca, where they would have to stay, “sighing in the valley” because they could not fulfill their desire to become nuns.<sup>88</sup> The phrase chosen by the abbess is a reference to the prayer *Salve Regina*, which would have been chanted by the nuns on a regular basis, as well as a play on the geography of Oaxaca. In this prayer, the faithful ask for the intercession of Mary and describe themselves as suffering in this sinful world, saying that “To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.” The indigenous women of Oaxaca, the abbess argued, were sighing and weeping as devotees of Christ in the metaphorical valley of tears, the earth, but also inhabited the literal valley of Oaxaca.

In a shorter response, only a paragraph long, the abbess of the existing Capuchin convent in Oaxaca, Madre María Luisa, abbess of the existing Capuchin convent in Antequera, wrote that she supported the project primarily because so many indigenous women felt the “love and longing” to enter religious life. In contrast, one of the male respondents focused on the affective positionality of the male caciques themselves. Fray Manuel Antonio Pinto, rector of the monastery of Santa María de la Merced in Oaxaca, wrote that he supported the project that the “Noble Caciques of this diocese solicit with such longing.”<sup>89</sup> Both Madre María Luisa and Fray Pinto used the Spanish word *anhelo*,

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<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Fray Carlos de Almodovar, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 67r.

<sup>89</sup> Manuel Antonio Pinto, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 80r.

which translates to deep, intense, longing, to describe the feelings of the indigenous people regarding the convent; but they concentrated on the perspectives of people of their own gender, and only women gave careful consideration to what acceptance to the convent might mean for the future nuns themselves.

In addition to general descriptions of the Christian piety of indigenous women, Creole supporters frequently used biblical imagery to incorporate indigenous women into the story of salvation history, albeit in ways that sometimes emphasized racial differences even as the use of the biblical metaphor suggested inclusion. Fray Pinto used the story of Jephthah, the Israelite war leader from the book of Judges, chapter 11, who sacrificed his own daughter as an offering after victory in battle. The war described in the book of Judges, explained Pinto, was God's punishment for the Israelites' practice of idolatry, and the offering of a virgin was sufficient to avert God's wrath. Although the text of Judges 11 strongly implies that Jephthah killed his unnamed daughter as the sacrifice, Pinto drew from later commentary, probably the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* of the first century, to claim that the daughter did not die, but was merely sent to live a life of complete dedication to God. If the offering of one person from an idolatrous nation could garner God's blessing, how much more so, Pinto argued, would the prayers of thirty-three nuns benefit the "American people"?<sup>90</sup> His argument rested on the conceptualization of indigenous people as a separate nation, stained by the sin of idolatry.

While Pinto was the only respondent to draw upon the story of Jephthah and his daughter, many others used images or phrases from the Song of Songs (also known as the Song of Solomon or the Canticle of Canticles). Shorter references to the Song of Songs,

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<sup>90</sup> Manuel Antonio Pinto, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 83.

such as calling the future nuns “lilies” (a descriptor which comes from Song of Songs 2:1-2), abounded in the letters of support, but two priests in particular embarked on an exegesis of the Song of Songs that occupied almost the entirety of their letters. The first, written by Fray Manuel de Noriega y Espina, the prior of the large Dominican monastery of Santo Domingo, was dated on March 26, 1742. Six weeks later, the prior of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, a Carmelite monastery added his response. This priest, Manuel de la Encarnación, had read the earlier letter from Noriega; he began his letter by commenting that he would “pick up the book that the reverend father...of Santo Domingo...had left open, and hope by his strivings the sacred scriptures would allow for further revelation.”<sup>91</sup> Evidently, the network of Catholic clergy in Antequera was small and close-knit, and drew upon informal relationships; while the two monasteries were located only about a block apart in the city, they belonged to different orders, and thus would not have had official reasons to interact often.

Both Noriega and de la Encarnación agreed that indigenous women could be called by God to become nuns. Noriega imagined Jesus beckoning to the women: ““Come, my friend, my dove, my beauty,”” Jesus would say to them, calling though the “thick walls” of the indigenous dwellings, ““...I will give you my hand as your spouse.””<sup>92</sup> De la Encarnación closed his letter by quoting Song of Songs 7:10. Once the new convent is opened, he explained, the King of Heaven will marry the poor Indians [*pobrecitas Indias*] of this diocese, “of whom each and every one will be able to say, in truth, ‘I am for my lover and he is mine.’”<sup>93</sup> In his usage of the Songs of Songs, de la

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<sup>91</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 56r-60; Fray Manuel de la Encarnación, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 6 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 73-79r.

<sup>92</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 59-59r.

<sup>93</sup> Fray Manuel de la Encarnación, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 6 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 78r-79.

Encarnación went even further in connecting the indigenous women with the beloved woman. At one point in the biblical text, the lover told the beloved that a single strand of her hair brings desire to his heart. Demonstrating his mastery of Latin, Hebrew, Spanish, and Nahuatl, de la Encarnación took several steps to connect this passage with the indigenous culture of Oaxaca. The Latin word used for lock of hair, he explained, was *crinis*, but this term in Hebrew actually referred to an adornment used by women, which hung from their heads onto their necks. In Oaxaca, women commonly wore a brightly colored cord which also hung from their heads to their shoulders. “In the general Mexican language,” de la Encarnación finished, “they call this adornment a Tlacoyale, from Tlaco which means the middle, and Yale, which means decoration.”<sup>94</sup> De la Encarnación's knowledge of Oaxacan fashion was correct, but he used this information to try to establish a connection between the indigenous people of the region, and the Hebrew people of the Song of Songs.<sup>95</sup> “It would not be impossible,” he wrote, “to believe that the use of this adornment by the Indians was a tradition or inheritance from the Hebrews, who in the opinion of some historians, passed to this New World, centuries before its discovery and conquest.” While Jewish ancestry was still seen as problematic in the Spanish Empire, this attempt to connect the indigenous with the “Lost Tribe” of the Israelites helped buttress their position as people called by God to salvation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Fray Manuel de la Encarnación, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 6 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 75r.

<sup>95</sup> Kathryn Klein, *El Hilo Continuo: La Conservación de Las Tradiciones Textiles de Oaxaca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Hector Manuel Meneses Lozano, “Traditional Innovation in Oaxacan Indigenous Costumes,” *DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, September 2014.

<sup>96</sup> The idea that the indigenous people of Mexico were descended from the lost tribes of Israel was a popular belief among early missionaries, particularly the Franciscans, but apparently had persisted in some circles through the eighteenth century. See José Rabasa, *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), chapter 4; Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (Routledge, 2013), chapter 9.

Noriega and de la Encarnación did not, however, envision indigenous women as exact representatives of the beloved in the Song of Songs. In Noriega's use of the metaphor, he made one major change: he flipped the geographical location of the lover and the beloved. In the biblical version, the woman lived in the city of Jerusalem, while her lover comes from the mountains outside the city. Noreiga, however, placed the beloved, representing the future nuns, on Mt. Lebanon, and described God/the lover as inviting her to enter the city of Jerusalem, away from the lions' dens and leopard's dwellings of the mountain. "The Divine Spouse searched in the mountains and the hills," Noreiga explained, "to call the maidens to the cloister."<sup>97</sup> De la Encarnación made a similar transposition. He quoted the daughters of Jerusalem, who look outside their city walls and ask: "Who is this that comes up from the desert?" (Song of Songs 3:6). De la Encarnación answered that it must be the indigenous women, coming into the city in order to become nuns. The very next verse in Biblical passage, however, offered a different answer to de la Encarnación's question: the person coming up from the desert was actually Solomon, king of Israel. The contrast between the two answers highlights the importance of geography for both Noriega and de la Encarnación. In their minds, salvation could only come about when people chose to leave in the wilderness and enter into the city. The idea that an admirable (and ethnically pure) person such as Solomon could also make the same journey did not fit into their metaphor.

Finally, the references to the Song of Songs also allowed Noriega and de la Encarnación to directly address questions of race. Noreiga began by referencing the idea that the indigenous women's racial identity might disqualify them from the convent. "It is

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<sup>97</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 59r.

wrong to think that the quality of these candidates could be seen in their faces,” he argued, “with its lack of whiteness.”<sup>98</sup> The cause of this skin tone, he explained, was merely exposure to the sun, so these women should not be considered as being naturally darker. Curiously, Noriega did not make an explicit connection to the Song of Songs with this explanation, despite the fact that the beloved woman of the biblical example also had dark skin. In the opening verses of the canticle, the woman says: “Dark am I, yet lovely, daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother’s sons were angry with me, and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyards I had to neglect” (Song of Songs 1:5). De la Encarnación did take up this comparison. While Noriega had already established that dark skin should not be a barrier to religious life, de la Encarnación argued that the dusky skin of the beloved in the Song of Songs should be seen as a marvelous foreshadowing of the existence of indigenous nuns. In fact, he concluded, the definition of the word dusky, according to Calepino’s famous dictionaries, was exactly the skin tone of the indigenous women of Oaxaca.<sup>99</sup> “These spouses,” he enthused, “had to be of dusky color, as in the color of smoke, rising as incense from the most noble and varied incense, rising from the desert wildernesses of this diocese, ascending to the best Jerusalem.”<sup>100</sup> De la Encarnación also paused to point out the fact that the lover in the Song of Songs was described as “white and ruddy.”<sup>101</sup> This, therefore, was an interracial union that he could support: a dusky, indigenous woman, seeking out the best spouse possible: the white Son of God.

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<sup>98</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 58r.

<sup>99</sup> Ambrogio Calepino, an Augustinian monk, published several dictionaries in the early sixteenth century.

<sup>100</sup> Fray Manuel de la Encarnación, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 6 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 74r.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 75.

In comparison with the arguments surrounding the foundation of the convent of Corpus Christi in the early 1720s (see Introduction), the Creole supporters of the Oaxaca convent seem to have more confidence in indigenous women's ability to practice Christianity. In fact, the topic of sexuality, so often used as a way to criticize or undermine indigenous women, only appeared in reference to the need to protect indigenous women from threats to their chastity. Two of the supporters expressed concern over the fact that indigenous women from Oaxaca were traveling all the way to Mexico City in the hopes that they might be accepted as nuns there. Manuel Noriega, prior of the monastery of Santo Domingo, commented that the journey was a major inconvenience to the aspirants from Oaxaca. Fray Joseph Arias, however, was even more concerned with the dangers that might await innocent girls on the road. "The daughters of this diocese," he argued, "should not have to leave [this diocese] in order to achieve their holy destiny." A local convent, he explained, would prevent the future nuns from exposing their "most beautiful innocence" and "most chaste love" to potential attacks from "worldly malice."<sup>102</sup> There are two remarkable things about Arias's comments. First of all, he described the indigenous women as daughters of the diocese, minimizing any racial differences between these women and Creole or Spanish women. Secondly, he treated indigenous women's chastity as valuable, and assumed that the future nuns were virgins – a major departure from the typical assumptions that indigenous women were naturally sexually promiscuous. (Of course, Arias was not completely free of racial prejudice; if he had believed that indigenous women and white women were exactly

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<sup>102</sup> Fray Joseph Arias, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 61r-62.

similar, he could have proposed that any of the existing convents in Oaxaca open their doors to indigenous women.)

Confidence in Native women's chastity grew throughout the eighteenth century. By 1766, the Oaxacan church cabildo would approve of the project as a place where "a choir of human angels, the virgin nuns" would pray and honor God.<sup>103</sup> A few months later, the *fiscal* [financial officer] of the diocese of Oaxaca would use similar language, praising the efforts of the caciques to "erect a sacred convent of virgin Indians for the perfect worship of the majesty of God."<sup>104</sup> When the Cacicas' Convent was about to open in 1782, Creoles also focused on protecting the chastity of the six indigenous nuns who left their convent of Corpus Christi to travel to Oaxaca and become the founding members of the Cacicas' Convent. The Spanish monarchy worked to secure approval of the Pope that would grant the nuns permission to temporarily leave their enclosure. On their "dangerous transit" across three dioceses (Mexico City, Puebla, and Oaxaca), the Pope ordered that the nuns be accompanied by priests who could say Mass for them and hear their confession.<sup>105</sup>

On the other hand, the trope of indigenous promiscuity did sometimes appear in the Creole supporters' responses, but within the context of religious, rather than sexual, purity. As mentioned earlier, the diocese of Antequera had only recently undertaken a massive extirpation campaign, and the idea that idolatrous practices still persisted clearly haunted many of the religious leaders in the area. When discussing the possibility of a convent for indigenous women, therefore, many used the language typically applied to

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<sup>103</sup> Approval of the Oaxacan church cabildo, 31 October 1766, AGI, México 2661, segundo cuaderno, 50.

<sup>104</sup> Statement of the Fiscal, 7 January 1767, AGI, México 2661, segundo cuaderno, 48r.

<sup>105</sup> Papal Bull of Pope Sixtus, 2 October 1776, AGI, México 2661.

sexual morality in reference to doctrinal adherence. For example, de la Encarnación imagined Christ saying to the new nuns: “The mother country that gave you your being was sadly corrupted by infidelity and lost all her integrity to idolatry.”<sup>106</sup> In this passage, de la Encarnación feminized indigenous culture, and turned traditional indigenous religious practices into a type of sexual transgression (infidelity and loss of integrity) against the bonds of Christianity. Similarly, Fray Joseph Arias wondered if “the Most High wanted that where there was the stain of idolatry, there would flourish the grace of the highest fidelity.”<sup>107</sup> Once again, the Indians nuns’ future constancy and devotion was not placed in opposition to promiscuity, but idolatry. Lack of faithfulness to Church teaching was seen as the deepest, darkest sin of the indigenous people of Oaxaca, but women’s chastity could help overcome this failing.

The convent also appealed to the Creole supporters, therefore, as a way of protecting indigenous women who wanted to fully practice Christianity. The recent extirpation campaign had only exacerbated Creoles’ tendencies to map religious overtones onto the geography of the region – making the city a place of religious salvation from the danger and evils of the wilderness – and many were eager to have the opportunity to rescue indigenous women by removing them from the supposedly sinful atmosphere of their original culture. Some, such as Arias, suggested that the wilderness could be converted: “Perhaps...in the caves where formidable dragons of infidelity lived,” he wrote, “the most beautiful soil would be found.”<sup>108</sup> Most, however, argued that

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<sup>106</sup> Fray Manuel de la Encarnación, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 6 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 78r.

<sup>107</sup> Fray Joseph Arias, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 61r.

<sup>108</sup> Fray Joseph Arias, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 61r. By “soil,” Arias was clearly referencing the parable of the sower and the seed, found in multiple gospels, which portrays an open heart as fertile ground for reception of Christian doctrine.

the indigenous women needed to be removed from their homes in order to achieve sanctity. Noreiga offered an argument that criticized indigenous peoples' intellectual capabilities and failure to understand their own surroundings, as well as their lack of Christianity. Just as the indigenous people, he claimed, neglect the plants around them and fail to recognize their medicinal value, so too do are they unaware of the high destiny of some of their women. Describing both the medicinal plants and the women called to be nuns, he concluded: "In the mountains, their virtues are useless."<sup>109</sup> Madre María Teresa was so dedicated to this idea that women had to be removed from the sinful environment that she invented new metaphors not found in the Bible. In her letter of support, she wrote of the care that God has for the smallest emergence of faith, arguing that the new convent would be a way of helping that faith grow. "Christ," she said, "...did not come to hide the light, but to let it shine; nor to trample the flowers, but to transplant them to better terrain."<sup>110</sup> Here, the abbess drew on Isaiah 42:3, commonly understood as a prophecy regarding the Messiah: "A bruised reed he shall not crush, and a smoldering wick he shall not extinguish." Madre María Teresa, however, added her own interpretation when she included the idea of moving the flowers to better terrain; there is no reference to transplanting in the Bible. While Noriega frequently referred to the indigenous women as lilies in order to make a connection with the Song of Songs, he also used this metaphor to reinforce the idea that the women had to be transferred into the city. He argued that these lilies were surrounded by thorns, the "abuses of neophytes, such as idolatry"; and that they remain "uncultivated" in the mountains. "We can compare the proposal of the

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<sup>109</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 57r.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Fray Carlos de Almodovar, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 66.

caciques," he concluded, "to the construction of a Garden in which to transplant those lilies."<sup>111</sup> Overall, Creole supporters' belief that indigenous women could make suitable nuns, it seems, did not engender a broader trust in the Christianity of indigenous peoples in general.

To be fair, the image of the cloister as a garden was not limited to convents for indigenous women. In describing the one of the first convents founded in Mexico, the Convent of Jesus María (1581), Creole intellectual Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora waxed poetic over the "beautiful plantation" of "the most fragrant lilies" where virtue "will be cultivated with the greatest care."<sup>112</sup> The analogy of the garden involved gender at multiple levels: as Sigüenza pointed out, while a woman was expelled from the perfection of the garden of Eden for her sins, the new garden of the convent would be a place where women could once again live like the angels. The Creole supporters of the Oaxaca convent, however, took this analogy of plants in a garden to an extreme. Fray Manuel Antonio Pinto, for example, described Native women as "branches of those plants, which in antiquity...only produced the poisonous fruits of idolatry. [But] now that these rational plants have been cultivated and instructed in our Catholic Dogmas, they look toward the rising of the Divine Sun of their spouse."<sup>113</sup> Later on, he used another example from nature. He compared indigenous nations to the mines of Potosí: rough rocks that concealed treasures deep within themselves. The natives of Oaxaca, he explained, were

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<sup>111</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 57r, 58.

<sup>112</sup> See Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 359 for a list of all the convents established in Mexico in the colonial period; the Convent of Jesus María was the third. Carlos de Sigüenza y Gongora, *Parayso Occidental: Plantado y Cultivado Por La Liberal Benefica Mano de Los Muy Catholicos y Poderosos Reyes de España, Nuestros Señores En Su Magnifico Real Convento de Jesus María En Mexico. 1684*, Fascimile of the first edition. (Mexico City: CONDUMEX, 1995), n.p. [dedication].

<sup>113</sup> Fray Manuel Antonio Pinto, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 84r.

now willingly bringing these treasures, their nobility and religiosity, to the surface. Nevertheless, Pinto's analogy carried within it a hidden threat: when a rock conceals its gold, "one must break its heart with many blows by a hammer."<sup>114</sup> Madre María Teresa, on the other hand, gave a slightly more positive view of the work of conversion: "If the Lord our God knows how to bring out light from the clouds and honey from the rock, even more can He, in concordance with nature, bring out light from the twilight and the dawn, and nectar from the fragrant flowers."<sup>115</sup> With this analogy, Madre María Teresa recognized some of the advancement in Christianity made by indigenous peoples. In her description, the Indians were no longer entirely opposed to Christianity: neither clouds nor rocks, they have become a dusky twilight or flowering plant, containing elements of light and sweetness. Nevertheless, the sheer number of these analogies from nature reinforces the fact that Creoles still saw a divide between themselves and indigenous peoples. In keeping with Bourbon ideology, the analogies and metaphors implied that the Indians could achieve similar levels of Christian religiosity if better trained and cultivated. Left to their own devices, however, they would be constrained by natural limits and doomed to squander their resources.

The final analogy made by the Oaxacan church cabildo, in approving of the convent project, neatly summarizes the various perspectives of the Creole inhabitants of Antequera. At first, the cabildo made a startling statement: The convent, they argued, was justified in light of the fact that "daily experience has shown that the Indians who obtain a well-rounded education in their childhood equal the most cultivated Spanish girl in reason and virtue." Taken alone, this argument implies that the Oaxacan cabildo believed

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<sup>114</sup> Pinto, Fray Manuel Antonio, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 20 May 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 85.

<sup>115</sup> Almodovar, Fray Carlos de, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 65.

that racial difference did not matter, and that education could create equality. On the other hand, they also state that the convent would be a place where the “all most precious daisies [*margaritas*] of the [Indian] Nation would be collected for the worship and glory of God.”<sup>116</sup> Notably, the cabildo chose to use daisies as a metaphor for the indigenous women, rather than lilies (making a biblical connection) or roses (commonly called Castilian roses in Mexico due to their importation from Spain), thus undermining their earlier argument that the indigenous girls were the equivalent of Spanish ones. Beyond that, the statement echoes earlier perspectives that indigenous women needed to be removed from their native soil and transplanted into a protected place; that these women were more valuable than their uncatechized indigenous brethren; and that any honor or glory gained by the creation of this convent would be directed to God alone, not to the nuns.

### **Gender and the Foundation of the Cacicas’ Convent: Cacique perspectives**

The arguments made by the indigenous petitioners and the Creole supporters overlapped on one main idea: the acceptance of women into the convent would increase the acceptance and practice of Catholicism by the indigenous people in Oaxaca. In fact, the first petition filed by Velasco and López mentioned this as one of the primary reasons why the convent should be built: “The Indians, in order that their daughters be accepted in the convent, will progress in the faith,” they claimed.<sup>117</sup> Noriega agreed, stating that the indigenous people, “seeing the exaltation of their sisters as spouses of Christ our Lord, will reject their prior coldness and timidity, and re-establish themselves in the

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<sup>116</sup> Approval of the Oaxacan Cabildo, 31 October 1766, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 246r.

<sup>117</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco and don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, undated (circa 1742-1743), NL, Ayer MS 1144, 45r.

faith.”<sup>118</sup> Specifically, both groups concluded, the presence of the convent would promote education in the Catholic faith, as well as in Spanish. Madre María Teresa used this perspective in her letter, hoping that the existence of a convent would encourage indigenous people to “seek out with greater fervor male and female teachers [*maestros y maestras*] who will teach them Spanish, Latin, virtue, and religion.”<sup>119</sup> Velasco and López echoed this viewpoint, promising that the use of Spanish among the indigenous people would increase, since the future nuns would need to be able to speak Spanish. On the other hand, the caciques also pointed out the potential risks of having so many indigenous people already involved with the petition: the success or failure of the convent proposal would have an impact on indigenous morale.<sup>120</sup> In general, however, both the caciques and the Creole supporters preferred to focus on the benefits that the convent would bring to the broader indigenous population.

Despite these points of concordance, there were also ways in which the caciques’ petitions revealed their differences with the Creole positions, specifically viewpoints on gender. As other scholars have noted, the caciques frequently referenced the concept of honor and ethnic pride in their petitions for the convent, arguing that the project would reflect well on the indigenous population of Oaxaca.<sup>121</sup> This emphasis was not unusual for convent proposals: within colonial New Spain, many groups and individuals founded convents as a way of demonstrating their piety, charity, and influence on urban society, and the caciques hoped for the opportunity to do the same through the Cacicas' Convent.

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<sup>118</sup> Noriega y Espina, Fray Manuel to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 58.

<sup>119</sup> Almodovar, Fray Carlos de, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 69-70.

<sup>120</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco y Aguilar and don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 30 October 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 124r-125.

<sup>121</sup> Díaz, ““Es Honor de Su Nación.””

However, in the first petition filed by the caciques, they also discussed the impact that the convent would have on women. In Velasco and Chávez's first petition, they argued that many indigenous people would hope to have their daughters enter the convent. What is interesting about the phrasing of their argument is the way in which it switches back and forth between gender neutral and gender specific pronouns. In one sentence, they used gender neutral pronouns to describe the entirety of the indigenous population: "the Indians will advance in their [*su*, gender neutral pronoun] faith in the hopes that their [*su*, again, gender neutral] daughters will be accepted into the convent." In the next sentence, however, they argue that this "high destiny" of the daughters would be to "the honor of them [*de ellos*, masculine pronoun] and them [*de ellas*, feminine pronoun], and the honor of God."<sup>122</sup> The parallelism of this sentence, describing both male and female honor, hearkens back to both Zapotec and Mixtec traditions, which were undergirded by a broad belief in gender complementarity.<sup>123</sup> Notably, neither Zapotec nor Mixtec languages require the use of gendered pronouns, so Velasco and Chávez made an explicit effort in Spanish to incorporate both male and female honor into their petition.<sup>124</sup> The context leaves it somewhat vague as to the identity of the honored women – while it most likely referred to the future nuns, it could also reference their mothers. Either way, initial indigenous conceptualization of the reasons for building a convent involved female as well as male honor.

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<sup>122</sup> Petition from Don Juan Manuel de Velasco and Don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, undated (circa 1742-1743), NL, Ayer MS 1144, 45r.

<sup>123</sup> See Kevin Terraciano, *The Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), especially 186-190; Susan Kellogg, *Weaving the Past: A History of Latin America's Indigenous Women from the Prehispanic Period to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 30-25 and 103-111; Ronald Spores and Andrew K. Balkansky, *The Mixtecs of Oaxaca: Ancient Times to the Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), especially 111-119 and 186-191.

<sup>124</sup> Lisa Sousa, *The Woman Who Turned Into a Jaguar, and Other Narratives of Native Women in the Archives of Colonial Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 45.

The emphasis on benefits to women continued throughout the first petition. Velasco and Chávez metaphorically described the donations that the indigenous would make to the convent project as indicators “of the care that they have on behalf of their daughters and female relatives, in order that they may become nuns.” Moreover, Velasco and Chávez discussed how educational opportunities would increase, specifically for women. Many indigenous women, they argued, would receive an education in Spanish and theology in the hopes that they might be able to achieve a position within the convent.<sup>125</sup> Overall, while some of the Creole supporters mentioned that the indigenous women would benefit from being transplanted into the protective garden of the cloister, the early petitions from the caciques emphasized specifically how women’s pride, honor, and education would benefit from the existence of the convent.

Soon, however, the caciques changed the focus of their petitions to better align with European gender norms. Even in their second petition, after diocese’s three-year delay demonstrated to the caciques that this would not be an easy battle, the caciques began to argue that the convent would have a benefit beyond women alone. “The women’s virtuous upbringing will serve as an example to others,” they argued in 1745.<sup>126</sup> Nine years later, they made a similar argument, but focused more specifically on the impact of the convent on indigenous men. “The Indians, in order that their daughters may be received in the convent, will endeavor with great care to raise them, educate them, and catechize them... And their parents, brothers, and relatives will become more

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<sup>125</sup> Petition from Don Juan Manuel de Velasco and Don Joseph López de Chávez to the Oaxacan Cabildo, undated (circa 1742-1743), NL, Ayer MS 1144, 45r-46.

<sup>126</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco y Aguilar and don Joseph López de Chávez, 30 October 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 124r.

firmly rooted in the faith and in Catholic piety.”<sup>127</sup> As in the arguments surrounding schools for indigenous girls (see Chapter 1), the religiosity of the aspiring nuns has become a tool for the broader conversion of society. Instead of discussing a woman’s entrance into the convent as a goal in and of itself, Velasco and López argued that the women would be instrumental in attracting others to the Catholic faith. In fact, the 1754 petition does not mention women’s honor at all, claiming instead that “Those who obtain acceptance into the convent will have achieved something to the great glory of God.” They also added that women would easily be able to attain the increased level of sanctity needed for entrance into the convent, since religious formation was “easy to impress on their docile natures.”<sup>128</sup> With this statement, Velasco and López echoed the arguments offered by many of the Creole supporters for the Cacicas’ Convent, and indeed even for convents for indigenous women in general (see Introduction): indigenous’ women’s natural meekness made them suitable candidates for the rigorous observances in the cloister.

In the final petition, from 1766, the women were completely erased from the caciques’ descriptions of their motives. They stated simply that the convent would be for “the Glory of the Lord our God, the temporal and spiritual benefit of the entire diocese, and the honor of our Nation.”<sup>129</sup> In their efforts to receive approval for the convent project, the caciques put less and less emphasis on the women who would eventually occupy it, in the end portraying them merely as vessels for the enrichment of Catholic practice in the diocese and the honor of indigenous people as an ethnic group. The

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<sup>127</sup> Petition of Juan de Velasco, 19 February 1754, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 135.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Petition, 3 August 1766, AGI, México 2661, segundo cuaderno 15r.

caciques' original emphasis on women's honor, which resonated with long-held traditions among the indigenous groups of the Oaxaca valley, had been submerged in the rhetoric of the petitions. By doing so, however, the caciques achieved their goal: a convent for the women of their nation.

**Chapter 4: “Oh, that the Indians were men!”:  
Gendered rhetoric and the founding of Brothertown, 1773 – 1785**

Although the female students at Moor’s Indian Charity School had learned specific tactics and strategies to ameliorate the effects of missionary paternalism upon themselves and their communities (see chapter 2), these approaches would not be enough to reverse the process of colonialism. As the eighteenth century progressed, European colonists grew bolder in their claims over traditionally indigenous land, using a wide variety of legal, economic, and social pressures to try to dispossess Native groups. In response, tribes used an equally wide variety of approaches to attempt to preserve their identity and economic well-being. One such strategy, espoused by Samson Occom (Mohegan/Brothertown), Joseph Johnson (Mohegan/Brothertown), and David Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown) among others, was the removal of eastern seaboard tribes further west, where they could establish a new Christian Indian community that would unite several tribes through the practice of a uniquely pan-Indian version of Christianity.

Unlike the foundation of a convent in Mexico (see chapter 3), the proposed plan did not rely expressly on official approval from colonial or religious officials, although intermediary steps, like the selling of indigenous land in Connecticut or Rhode Island, did require certain governmental permissions. Nevertheless, the emphasis on gender that had been present in the Oaxaca petitions also made an impact on the formation of the new community, which would eventually be named Brothertown. Occom, Johnson, and Fowler made repeated references to concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the ways in which indigenous men and women could live out these gender ideals more freely than in colonial New England. The men’s definitions of masculinity and femininity, however, did not always resonate with indigenous women, whose actions seemed to challenge or

stretch the men's definitions. Moreover, women also saw moving to Brothertown as a viable strategy for survival in the late eighteenth century, and widows and unmarried women – not moving at the behest of any man – were among those who joined the migration.

### **The Creation of Brothertown: Background**

The Brothertown movement originated among several groups of coastal New England people, generally members of Algonquian-language ethnic groups. Algonquian people typically understood the world around them as both a physical and spiritual place, and described supernatural occurrences, things, or people as inhabited by *Manitou*. Funerary practices indicate they had a high level of respect for ancestors, and kinship networks were an important part of social organization. By the late sixteenth century, they had developed agricultural methods for farming corn, beans, and squash but also relied on seasonal migration for harvesting wild food sources.<sup>1</sup>

After European contact, Algonquian-speaking peoples living in the colonies of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts (including Long Island) were often referred to simply as the “New England tribes.” Included in this group were Mohegan, Montauk, Narraganset, Niantic, Pequot, and Tunxis settlements, all of whom were eventually represented at Brothertown. These groups had suffered from virgin soil epidemics, spread by European fishermen and traders exploring the eastern seaboard, even before the arrival of the first English colonizers to the area in 1620. Initially,

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<sup>1</sup> Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England, 1500-1643* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) chapter 1; Neal Salisbury, “The Indians’ Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of Europeans,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 53, no. 3 (July 1, 1996): 435–58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2947200>; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

relations between the English and the New England tribes were relatively peaceful. Conflict between the Massachusetts and Connecticut colonies, however, led to the violent Pequot War of 1637, which included the genocidal slaughter of over 500 Pequots in Mystic, Connecticut. In addition to expansionary violence, ecological change continued to have a negative impact on New England tribal populations, which diminished precipitously over the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> The 1675 defeat of Wampanoag chief Metacomet in King Philip's War, a rebellion against English colonialism that involved so-called Praying Indians (i.e., converted indigenous) on both sides, helped solidify Anglo-American identity and hardened racialized prejudice against indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup>

While missionary efforts among the Algonquian people were often overshadowed by other aspects of English colonialism, Christianity sometimes did offer a modicum of protection against violence directed toward indigenous people. In the eighteenth century, many Anglo-American missionaries began to focus on schools for young children, offering them education and training in farming methods, along with a hefty dose of

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<sup>2</sup> Kristina Bross and Hilary E. Wyss, eds., *Early Native Literacies in New England: A Documentary and Critical Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 2; Craig N. Cipolla, *Becoming Brothertown: Native American Ethnogenesis and Endurance in the Modern World* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 36–39; Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2 edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Roger Williams, *A Key Into the Language of America* (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2010), pages A4, 128 on connections with Judaism, and 124, 131 on competition with Catholic missionaries; Bross and Wyss, *Early Native Literacies in New England*, 2008; Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Eliot quoted in James P. Ronda, "Generations of Faith: The Christian Indians of Martha's Vineyard," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 38, no. 3 (July 1, 1981): 371, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1921953>; David J. Silverman, *Faith and Boundaries: Colonists, Christianity, and Community among the Wampanoag Indians of Martha's Vineyard, 1600-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Laura Arnold Leibman, ed., *Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts: A Cultural Edition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

Christianity. Some indigenous communities in coastal New England welcomed this approach, seeing the schools as a way of ensuring their children's ability to survive in a rapidly changing world. Both schoolhouses and churches proliferated among indigenous communities starting in the 1720s. For example, by 1755 there were four churches in Charlestown, a Narragansett community of around 500 people, encompassing both Anglican and Congregationalists beliefs. New Light Christianity, which developed out of the Great Awakening that spread along the Eastern seaboard in the mid-eighteenth century, also took hold among the New England tribes. While white missionaries directed much of this growth, indigenous preachers and schoolteachers helped translate the sermons, often preaching themselves when a missionary was absent.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, many indigenous groups actively used the power of literacy to defend their lands, deciding that participating in and navigating colonial structures offered their best chance at survival. For example, from the late seventeenth century through 1773, the Mohegan tribe was embroiled in legal conflict with the state of Connecticut over white settlement on what had been Mohegan land. Mohegan petitioners, often supported by the Mason family, long-time allies of the Mohegans, brought their complaints about settlement to local governments and the Connecticut General Assembly. In both 1703 and

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<sup>4</sup> Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapters 3, 4, and 5; Margaret Szasz, *Scottish Highlanders and Native Americans: Indigenous Education in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Rachel Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Laura J. Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Hilary E. Wyss, *Writing Indians: Literacy, Christianity, and Native Community in Early America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Joanna Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Literature and Leadership in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663-1880*, Reprint edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

1736, the Mohegans made their case directly to the Crown – Queen Anne in the first case and King George II in the latter – and even sent a delegation to London along with the 1736 petition. As one of the Mohegans’ attorneys noted at the time, the written treaty record should have “sufficiently ascertained and secured...[the Mohegan’s] boundaries and properties.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the Mohegans understood the utility of leveraging text in order to secure land claims.

While the particulars of this conflict, often known as the Mohegan Land Controversy, varied, the Mohegans often received favorable juridical decisions, offering hope that their literacy skills and engagement with English court systems might work in their favor. The Farmington Tunxis, Groton Pequots, and Niantics followed suit, petitioning the Connecticut General Assembly for help in defending their lands.<sup>6</sup> In 1767, the Narragansetts made a similar attempt, sending Narragansett leaders John and Toby Shattock – both educated at Moor’s Charity School – to London hoping to undo the Connecticut General Assembly’s seizure of Narragansett lands.<sup>7</sup>

However, the limitations of this approach became increasingly clear over the eighteenth century. Royal laws and declarations were easily ignored by English settlers, often abetted by the Connecticut General Assembly and other powerful colonial officials.<sup>8</sup> Sickness and poverty continued to limit indigenous efforts to defend their

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Lisa Tanya Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Memorial of the Farmington Indians, 10 May 1730, Connecticut State Archives [hereafter CSA], Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 1, 171a-b.; Memorial of the Pequot Indians, 7 October 1731, CSA, Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 1, 138-139; Memorial of the Niantic Indians, 2 May 1749, Series 1, Vol 2, 17a-b.

<sup>7</sup> See James Dow McCallum, *The Letters of Eleazar Wheelock’s Indians* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Publications, 1932), 209–12.

<sup>8</sup> See also John William De Forest, *History of the Indians of Connecticut from the Earliest Known Period to 1850*. (Hartford, CT: W. J. Hamersley, 1852), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000247222>; Jean M O’Brien, *Dispossession by Degrees: Indian Land and Identity in Natick, Massachusetts, 1650-1790* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*; Wyss, *Writing*

lands; members of both the Mohegan delegation in 1736 and the Narragansett delegation of 1767 died of disease, while beleaguered sachems made side deals to sell land to try to maintain economic solvency, often creating further conflict within their tribe. As historian Allan Greer has argued, indigenous peoples' attempts to participate in treaty-making and the creation of land deeds did not help them secure their lands. In fact, "by helping to build a paper edifice of titles, Indian deeds... functioned as a vital element of which that market in land was being constructed... [a market] built for settlers [by] colonial governments."<sup>9</sup> For example, when a Narragansett man in Charlestown, Rhode Island, petitioned the Rhode Island legislature in 1759 for permission to sell his land to settle debts, lawmakers responded by issuing a blanket permission for all indigenous people to sell their lands, making legal dispossession of native groups much easier.<sup>10</sup> Unlike in Mexico, where indigenous populations remained high enough that the Spanish monarchy felt compelled to make certain concessions in land ownership as part of a broader balancing act to maintain control of its far-flung empire, indigenous people in British North America had little chance of gaining meaningful support from the British monarchy. And at least in coastal New England, neither could they convincingly threaten violence in defense of their lands.

Some coastal New England Indians hoped that identifying as Christian might help them secure a better foothold in the rapidly changing New England society. By the mid-

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*Indians*; Drew Lopenzina, "'The Whole Wilderness Shall Blossom as the Rose': Samson Occom, Joseph Johnson, and the Question of Native Settlement on Cooper's Frontier," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2006): 1119–45.

<sup>9</sup> Allan Greer, "Dispossession in a Commercial Idiom: From Indian Deeds to Land Cession Treaties," in *Contested Spaces of Early America*, ed. Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 87.

<sup>10</sup> Petition of Thomas Ninegret, 1759, and Declaration of General Assembly, August 1759, Rhode Island Historical Society, Paul Campbell Research Notes, Box 2, Folder 9.

eighteenth century, Christianity was fairly widely practiced among coastal tribes, with several churches comprised entirely of indigenous attendees. Nearly all of the men and women who would go on to found Brothertown were raised by indigenous parents who had already converted to Christianity, and their diaries and letters certainly express a sincere belief in the main tenets of Protestant doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Without questioning the interior lives of these indigenous Christians, however, we can also recognize that the patronage of a Christian missionary had a direct and practical impact on their lives. Sponsorship from a missionary organization, such as the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England or the Boston Board of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) supplied the salaries of several indigenous schoolteachers. Eleazar Wheelock wrote passes that allowed his students to travel throughout New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, when they might otherwise have been suspected of being French spies, runaway slaves, or simply vagrants.<sup>12</sup> In other words, association with ministers and missionaries helped indigenous people acquire goods and money, and in some cases partially ameliorated the impact of racial prejudice.

In fact, many of the future founders of Brothertown spent years developing relationships with missionary societies and sought their patronage in the hopes of garnering increased respect within Anglo-American colonial society. Oocom, for example, lived with Eleazar Wheelock for four years studying theology, rhetoric, and languages, and then dedicated several decades to both teaching school and preaching Christianity among various coastal tribes, including the Montauketts of Long Island. In

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<sup>11</sup> See Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013); Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening*. In Charlestown, Rhode Island, for example, there were four churches serving the Narragansetts by 1760.

<sup>12</sup> For examples of these passes, see McCallum, 231, 234, 240.

1759, he was ordained a minister by the Long Island Presbytery, becoming the first indigenous man to receive this designation. The church council who examined Occom before his ordination, comprised of several Anglo-American ministers ordained by the Presbyterian church, concluded that he was “in good measure qualified for the work of gospel ministry” and approved his ordination.<sup>13</sup> Rev. Samuel Buell, a minister stationed in Long Island, gave a sermon on the day of Occom’s ordination in which he celebrated how Occom had been “called of God to preach the Gospel to the heathen,” and had amply demonstrated all the requirements of the ministry, including his “competency of natural endowments, acquired improvements, orthodoxy or soundness in the faith [and] visible holiness of life.”<sup>14</sup> In 1765, the newly-formed Connecticut Board of the SSPCK, of which Wheelock was one of the nine members, declared that Moor’s students Joseph Wooley (Delaware), David Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown), and Hezekiah Calvin (Delaware) had demonstrated their capacity to serve as schoolteachers, a position which would be compensated by the SSPCK.<sup>15</sup> Individual donations also came in for the Christian Indian missions, such as when Occom preached at several churches in New York City in 1761 and received nearly seventy-five pounds sterling in offerings; he concluded that people were “uncommonly kind” in the city.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1899), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Buell, *The Excellence and Importance of the Saving Knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel-Preacher, Plainly and Seriously Represented and Enforced: And Christ Preached to the Gentiles in Obedience to the Call of God. A Sermon, Preached at East-Hampton, August 29, 1759; at the Ordination of Mr. Samson Occum [i.e., Occom], a Missionary among the Indians*. (New York: James Parker, 1761), 21, 25, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N06942.0001.001>.

<sup>15</sup> “Several things to be considered & acted upon by the Board...” 12 March 1765, Dartmouth College, Rauner Library, Wheelock Papers [hereafter DC, Wheelock Papers,], 765212.1.

<sup>16</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 24 June 1761, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 67.

Women, too, benefitted from these connections and from establishing a reputation as good Christian women. Wheelock wrote a letter of recommendation for a Mohawk student at Moor's, identified only as Susanna, describing her as "a young woman of virtue" and worthy of all the "civilities, charities, and kindness of all who may have opportunity to express and she occasion to receive the same."<sup>17</sup> Miriam Storres, a Delaware girl who was one of Wheelock's first students, was approvingly described as "savingly converted" by missionary John Brainerd and a person who had made "discoveries of the Truth" by Wheelock."<sup>18</sup> When she graduated from the school and returned to her home in New Jersey, Brainerd helped her find employment.<sup>19</sup>

Much to the chagrin of Occom, Fowler, Storres, and others, however, these letters, passes, and other forms of support failed to offer them concrete protection from racial prejudice. In fact, they often discovered racial prejudice shaped even the types of support they were offered. In 1764, Occom informed Wheelock that he would continue on a mission trip to New York despite a lack of funding from the SSPCK, although he noted that "no white missionary would go in such circumstances."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, he wrote that the board only paid him ten pounds for a six-month stint teaching school in Montauk, several pounds less than the going rate for white schoolteachers.<sup>21</sup> Jacob Fowler

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<sup>17</sup> "Susanna's Recommendation," 29 July 1768, in McCallum, 240.

<sup>18</sup> Brainerd, John, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 September 1761, published in Thomas Brainerd, *The Life of John Brainerd, the Brother of David Brainerd, and His Successor as Missionary to the Indians of New Jersey*. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, ADF Randolph, 1865), 332, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/abb4262.0001.001>; Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Andrew Gifford, 24 February 1763, in McCallum, 70.

<sup>19</sup> John Brainerd, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 25 Dec 1772, in Brainerd, *The Life of John Brainerd*, 395–96.

<sup>20</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, Aug 1764, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 72.

<sup>21</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 22 Aug 1764, in Brooks, 71; See also Samson Occom, letter to Joseph Fish, 16 Nov 1770, in Brooks, 93 where Occom notes that the white schoolteacher at Stonington was paid 24£ for the year, as well as being given a home, land for farming, and several farm animals, all in recompense for his teaching -- but still complained that his pay was too low.

(Montauk/Brothertown), Occom's brother-in-law, was similarly paid only twelve pounds a year for teaching school in Pequot; David Fowler was paid fifteen pounds a year to teach in Montauk, but his white successor was paid twenty pounds a year.<sup>22</sup> The indigenous schoolteachers were clearly aware that their lower pay was due to racial prejudice. For example, in a 1773 letter to Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull, Joseph Johnson concluded that his pay was based simply in the belief that "an Indian don't [sic] deserve to have as much as an English man." Frustrated with this situation, he asked Trumbull, "May not everyone that tries to do good, and be serviceable to his fellow creatures, be suitably encouraged whether English or Indian?"<sup>23</sup> Johnson's question went unanswered; missionary societies never funded indigenous schoolteachers, missionaries, and preachers at the same level as their white counterparts.

Racial prejudice, however, impacted more than just the financial support offered to Indian ministers and schoolteachers; it constrained indigenous interactions with white colonists and provided ample ammunition for gossip and criticism. The Indian students at Moor's were required to attend Sunday services at Wheelock's Congregationalist church in Lebanon, Connecticut, but had to sit in designated pews, separated from the rest of the congregation: men in the gallery over the stairs, and women in the farthest back pew of the women's section.<sup>24</sup> After returning home to New Jersey, Miriam Storres sought an apprenticeship in a tailor's shop, which would have built upon her training at Moor's, but

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<sup>22</sup> Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 197.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Johnathan Trumbull, early summer 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 189.

<sup>24</sup> *150th Anniversary of the Organization of the Congregational Church in Columbia, Conn., October 24th, 1866*. (Hartford, CT.: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1867), 51.

was only able to find work as a domestic servant.<sup>25</sup> Even children faced discrimination: a white schoolteacher in Mohegan, Robert Clelland, began to allow white children to attend his school, a decision which meant that Native children were forced to take the worst seats in the schoolhouse, “away from the fire in the coldest seasons.”<sup>26</sup> Ten years after his ordination, Occom faced accusations that he had been drunk in public, a serious charge for a minister. He formally apologized for his drunkenness to the Presbyterian board that had ordained him, but wrote privately to Wheelock: “I don’t remember that I have been overtaken with strong drink this winter, but many white people make no bones of it to call me a drunkard. ... Them pretended Christians are seven times worse than the Savage Indians. I never was so discouraged as I am now.”<sup>27</sup> Social interactions, both large and small, clearly communicated to Native New England populations that white colonists considered them inferior.

Occom’s discouragement in the winter of 1769 was the result of a number of factors, which would continue to accumulate into the early 1770s. “Your having so many white scholars and so few or no Indian scholars, gives me great discouragement,” he wrote to Wheelock in 1771.<sup>28</sup> Between 1765 and 1768, Occom had travelled to the United Kingdom on a fundraising tour for Moor’s School and missionary efforts to the New England tribes in general. While the tour was relatively successful financially, Occom had his doubts about the true motivations of the donors, who treated him like a “gazing stock, yea, even a laughing stock.”<sup>29</sup> “It seems to me that [the English bishops] are very

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<sup>25</sup> Brainerd, *The Life of John Brainerd, the Brother of David Brainerd, and His Successor as Missionary to the Indians of New Jersey*, 382.

<sup>26</sup> Mohegan Tribe Against Robert Clelland, 26 April 1764, in Brooks, 145.

<sup>27</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 17 March 1769, in Brooks, 89.

<sup>28</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 24 July 1771, in Brooks, 99.

<sup>29</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 24 July 1771, in Brooks, 99.

indifferent whether the poor Indians go to Heaven or Hell,” he wrote in 1768. “I can’t help my thoughts; and I am apt to think they don’t want the Indians to go to Heaven with them.”<sup>30</sup> He returned home to find his family struggling financially, due in part to Wheelock’s neglect: Wheelock had promised to care for Occom’s family during the trip but failed to do so. Then, in 1769, Wheelock began to plan to move his school to New Hampshire, closer to where he believed the frontier lay. More importantly to Occom, Wheelock decided to focus on educating white students to be missionaries, and only brought two Native students with him on the move north in 1770. For Occom, this was the final straw. He wrote an angry letter to Wheelock in July 1771, excoriating him for turning Occom’s alma mater into an “alba mater,” a white mother who was “ashamed to suckle the Tawnees.”<sup>31</sup> Occom had envisioned himself as a partner or colleague of Wheelock’s in the work of converting the New England tribes, but now felt that he had simply been used to raise money for a school ultimately destined for whites, without Wheelock ever seeing him as an equal. Reflecting on the events a decade later, he wrote to another friend that “[Wheelock] has done little or no good to the Indians with all the money we collected in England...all that money has done, it has made the Doctor’s family very grand in the world.”<sup>32</sup> Occom had dedicated years of his life to working for Wheelock and achieving a number of Anglo-American status symbols such as ordination, but all the credit accrued to Wheelock. Occom himself remained a marginalized subject, vulnerable to racial prejudice and discrimination.

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<sup>30</sup> Samson Occom, “They Don’t Want the Indians to Go to Heaven with Them (1768)” in Brooks, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 24 July 1771, in Brooks, 98–100.

<sup>32</sup> Samson Occom, letter to John Bailey, summer 1783, in Brooks, 119.

Perhaps the clearest image of Christianity's failure to protect indigenous people comes from a complaint written in 1787 by Charlestown Narragansetts. There, a group of Narragansetts had built a church, or meeting-house, where they could conduct their Sunday services. However, it had become commonplace that "whilst the people are peaceably gathered together, performing their devotion, many of the loose, disorderly, vain, and thoughtless sally upon the Meeting, replete with language horrid to the ear, and behavior disagreeable to behold, to the great grief and disturbance of [church attendees]." <sup>33</sup> Even Christian services, when conducted by Native people, failed to gain respect from their white neighbors.

### **Leaving New England**

By the late 1760s, a few New England tribes began to consider the possibility of moving further west, to land that had yet to come under heavy European colonization. Initially, however, these tribes felt they were in a position to be selective about their final destination. Correspondence between John Shattock of the Narragansetts and Eleazar Wheelock indicates that by 1769, a portion of the Narragansett tribe was actively seeking a new homeland. As Wheelock recounted to John Wentworth, governor of New Hampshire, Shattock had approached Wheelock looking for advice on where the Narragansetts "might purchase a township of good lands, on which they might settle by themselves." <sup>34</sup> Wheelock believed that New Hampshire might prove the perfect place for the Narragansetts to settle, with rich soil, good fishing, and – perhaps most importantly – where the Narragansetts could serve as an "initial barrier to the French" if Canada ever

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<sup>33</sup> Harry, David, representative of Charleston Narragansetts, to the Honorable General Assembly of Rhode Island, March 1787, Rhode Island Historical Society, Paul Campbell Research Notes, Box 2 Folder 12.

<sup>34</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to John Wentworth, 5 December 1769, DCA, WP 769655.

returned to French control.<sup>35</sup> Governor Wentworth was amenable to the plan, but after consulting with his tribe, Shattock declined Wentworth's offer a few months later. The land in New Hampshire, he explained, was not exactly what his tribe was seeking. "[They] would willingly pursue the scheme of settling that land if it were further to the southward," he explained. But some Narragansetts who had traveled to that region reported that the "weather was harder and colder than it was here [in Rhode Island], by which they think the summer seasons must be a vast deal shorter than they are here." In other words, it was not a good location for a tribe with only a few decades' experience in English-style agriculture to start anew.<sup>36</sup> In the spring of 1770, the situation was not so dire as that the tribe felt they had to pursue removal at any cost.

Within a few years, however, the idea of removal to the west emerged again. This time, Joseph Johnson, David Fowler, and Samson Occom spearheaded the movement, and their final destination would be Oneida territory in upstate New York, where they had all traveled, and where Johnson and Fowler had lived as schoolteachers for extended periods of time. Johnson later would take credit for the idea, writing to the Connecticut General Assembly in June 1774, "I was the very first mover of this design."<sup>37</sup> It is certainly clear that Johnson was a primary actor in laying the groundwork for the move. In the spring of 1773, Johnson had been serving as a schoolteacher among the Tunxis of Farmington (who, it should be noted, were willing to pay him £24 a year for teaching, the going rate for white schoolteachers) before traveling back to his hometown of Mohegan

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<sup>35</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to John Wentworth, 5 December 1769, DCA, WP 769655.

<sup>36</sup> John Shattock, to Eleazar Wheelock, 26 March 1770, DC, Wheelock Papers., 770226.2.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Connecticut General Assembly, 2 June 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 224.

in March 1773.<sup>38</sup> In Mohegan, discontent and unease were brewing. As Samson Occom reported to Samuel Buell, one of the ministers who ordained him, in a January 1773 letter: “The grand controversy which has subsisted between the colony of Connecticut and the Mohegan Indians above seventy years [meaning “for more than seventy years”] we hear is finally decided, and it is in favor of the colony.” For Occom, this decision, the final outcome of the long-debated Mohegan Land controversy and the effort to secure Mohegan land titles that had occupied so much of the tribe’s attention and efforts in the eighteenth century, demonstrated the futility of indigenous people trying to use legal methods to defend their homelands. “I am afraid the poor Indians will never stand a good chance with the English in their land controversies because they are very poor. They have no money, [and] money is almighty nowadays.”<sup>39</sup> A new approach was needed.

Although it is unclear who specifically called the meeting, representatives from several Christian New England tribes – namely, Mohegan, Farmington Tunxis, Niantic, Stonington Pequots, Narragansett, Montaukett, and Mashantucket Pequots – gathered on March 13, 1773 to discuss the possibility of moving elsewhere. According to Johnson’s later account of the meeting, those in attendance were determined to move elsewhere. The first question, however, was where they should go. “Some were of a mind to go southward as far as Ohio,” reported Johnson, “and some not so far that way. ...At last it came into our minds to purchase some land from some of the Six Nations.”<sup>40</sup> Upstate New York, the territory of the Iroquoian Six Nations alliance, was a familiar place to many of the New England Indians: several of them had been sent as missionaries or

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Samson Occom, 5 April 1773 in Murray, 184.

<sup>39</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Samuel Buell, [January] 1773, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 104.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Johnson’s Address at Kanohaware, 20 January 1774, DC, Wheelock Papers 774120.

schoolteachers to the Oneida. The meeting ended with a resolution to seek a new homeland in Oneida territory, and to ask for the assistance of Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, in negotiating the deal. (NB: To distinguish between Sir William Johnson and Joseph Johnson hereafter, I will refer to William as Sir William and Joseph as simply Johnson.) Although men, women, and children were all present at this meeting, only men were selected to undertake land negotiations.

In early September 1773, Samson Occom met with Sir William in Long Island, where the latter happened to be traveling.<sup>41</sup> Later, Johnson mentioned that in fact nine of the New England Indians had met with Sir William during this same visit, although few details exist of these meetings.<sup>42</sup> Shortly thereafter, Sir William sent a letter outlining the details of the plan to the Oneida in upstate New York. On October 15, 1773, a delegation of Oneida met with Sir Johnson back at his permanent home, some fifty miles northwest of Albany and eighty miles due east of the Oneida heartland. They agreed to grant the New England Indians a tract of land ten miles square within Oneida territory, and asked for representatives of the tribes to come visit them and settle the details over the winter, when their hunting season had ended.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the Oneida offer of a gift of land was much more generous than what the New England Indians had proposed, which was to purchase land. There was a good reason for this: as the southernmost member of the Six Nations confederation, the Oneida had found themselves uncomfortably close to expanding European settlements. The 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix created a legal line of

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<sup>41</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Susannah Wheatley, 21 September 1773, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Johnson's Address at Kanohaware, 20 January 1774, DC, Wheelock Papers., 774120.

<sup>43</sup> "Extract from Indian Records," 15 October 1773, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, vol. 12 (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1957), 1037, <http://archive.org/details/papersofsirwilli12johnuoft>.

demarcation between Six Nations territory and lands available for English settlement, but the Oneida were skeptical of the solidity of this line. As was common Six Nations' policy, the Oneida welcomed refugee indigenous groups, who they placed along the boundary line as a first line of defense.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, Johnson was busy gathering support and solidifying the plan among the New England tribes. On October 13, 1773, Johnson and eight other Farmington men sent a circular to the rest of the tribes, encouraging them to select delegates to travel to upstate New York and inspect the land.<sup>45</sup> As Laura Murray notes, seven of the eight men signing the letter had also boarded Johnson during his time teaching school at Farmington, underscoring the importance of Johnson's personal connections in creating the Brothertown movement.<sup>46</sup> Johnson originally proposed setting out just a few weeks later, but on October 27, he received a note from Sir Johnson indicating that the Oneida wanted to meet in the winter.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, in December of that year Johnson and the Farmington Indians sent out another letter requesting each tribe send at least one representative to the meeting in upstate New York, scheduled for early January. Apparently, the plan had lost some momentum over the summer and fall. Johnson reminded the tribes that at the March meeting, they had promised to send delegates to make the practical arrangements, but by December Johnson began to encounter "lukewarmness and indifference" to the plan. He tried to rally support by arguing that this trip

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<sup>44</sup> Karim M. Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation from the Revolution through the Era of Removal*, Native Americans of the Northeast; Native Americans of the Northeast (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 28–35.

<sup>45</sup> Farmington Indians, letter to "All our Indian Brethren," 13 October 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 198–200.

<sup>46</sup> Murray, 200.

<sup>47</sup> "A true copy from the extract which I received from the Honorable Sir William Johnson...Oct 27" in McCallum, 157–58.

might be the only one they would have to undertake before actually moving: “We think we could do much by this winter’s journey,” he wrote. “We could do so much as that we need not go up again, until we go to settle the land.”<sup>48</sup> In the end, only four men set out: Johnson represented the Mohegan tribe (Occom wrote that he would have gone if he had been in better health). Jacob Fowler (Montauk/Brothertown) represented both the Montauks and the Groton Pequots, where he had served as schoolmaster. Samuel Tobias represented the Narragansetts, and Elijah Wimpy represented the Farmington Indians. Even this small crew would not make it all the way to Oneida: two were injured along the way and had to turn back.<sup>49</sup> Only Johnson and one other companion arrived in Oneida in late January 1774 to begin the negotiations.

The meeting with the Oneida stretched over four days. As David Silverman has argued, this conference involved all of the “intricacies of Iroquois protocol” which included “multiple stages of ritual, proposal, deliberation, counterproposal, and then more deliberation” in order to “forge consensus and foster a spirit of amity.”<sup>50</sup> In developing his speech, Johnson probably relied on the cultural knowledge he had gained while he lived among the Oneidas for about a year and a half in 1767-1768, assisting white missionary Samuel Kirkland. Nevertheless, he relied on a translator, schoolmaster Edward Johnson, when addressing the Oneidas – unsurprising, since another Moor’s student, Delaware Hezekiah Calvin, had spent two years in the same region but still

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<sup>48</sup> “To the Indians Concerning Oneida Lands,” Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 204.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Johnson’s Address at Kanohaware, 20 January 1774, DC, Wheelock Papers., 774120. Note: Johnson identified this speech as taking place on January 20, but later stated that it occurred on a Friday and that Friday was the 21<sup>st</sup> day of January. The speech was filed in the Wheelock Papers (which uses an organization system based on the date of the documents) with the date of January 20, but it seems likely that Johnson simply erred and meant to identify his speech as taking place on Friday, January 21.

<sup>50</sup> David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 99.

described himself as a “dumb stump,” unable to speak the local language, at the end of that time period.<sup>51</sup>

Johnson’s speech, which he later recorded himself along with the Oneida responses, outlined the history of the New England Indians and the reasons why they were seeking a new home. He opened by declaring the current state of poverty among the New England Indians, which he blamed upon “the ignorance of our forefathers” as well as the “wicked and unjust men among the English” – although, perhaps mindful of the presence of the English translator, he was quick to add that there were also “a great many good and just men amongst the English” and that he in no way intended to “create a prejudice in your hearts against the English.” Instead, he emphasized that the seven New England towns had come together to try to “settle down together in peace.” He then summarized the events of 1773: how the towns had decided that land in the Six Nations territory would be their best option, how they had received the approbation of Sir William Johnson, and how Sir Johnson had brokered initial communications between the Oneida and the New England Indians. Johnson emphasized that the New England Indians were excited and grateful for this opportunity, despite the fact that only two men had traveled to Oneida to confirm the transfer of land. He reported that he had carried the Oneida’s initial response to six out of the seven towns (having been called home by “business” before he could reach the seventh) and that in each location he “called the people together, both great and small, male and female, and they received the good news

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<sup>51</sup> I assume that this Edward Johnson was the same schoolmaster to the Tuscarora who wrote letters to Sir William Johnson in 1762, as recorded in *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, vol. 3 (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1921), 675; and was also mentioned as a schoolteacher in William Martin Beauchamp, *A History of the New York Iroquois, Now Commonly Called the Six Nations* (Albany: New York State Education Dept., 1905), 319, [http://archive.org/details/historyofnewyork00beau\\_0](http://archive.org/details/historyofnewyork00beau_0). The “dumb stump” quote comes from Hezekiah Calvin, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 August 1767, in McCallum, 57.

with great joy.” The small delegation that had arrived in Oneida, he explained, was due to the harsh traveling conditions of winter, as well as the fact that two men had to turn back because of injuries.<sup>52</sup>

As was customary for Six Nations’ negotiations, the Oneida gave Johnson a short initial response to his speech, promising to consider it further. Their second response, a longer speech on Saturday evening, focused first on the shared Christian identity of both groups. Johnson had only mentioned God a handful of times in his first speech, thanking God in the last paragraph of his speech for leading him safely to Oneida. In contrast, the Oneidas opened their speech with a prayer, giving thanks that “God is allowing us this opportunity of assembling ourselves once more” and asking that “God would direct us and lead us to such conclusions as will be most pleasing to him concerning this affair which has been laid before us for our consideration.” Only then did they proceed to answer Johnson.

Their response indicates that the Oneida welcomed the proposal of the New England Indians, and believed that it was perhaps “the Lord that steered your minds this way. They asked for only two conditions. First, that New England Indians would “continue to follow the directions given to us in God’s word.” Secondly, that the New England Indians respect the “unchristianized tribes” living in the region, paying due attention to the system of seniority and authority long-established among the Six Nations – namely, respecting the Mohawks, Onondagas, and the Senecas as “fathers.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Joseph Johnson’s Address at Kanohaware, 20 January 1774, DC, Wheelock Papers 774120.

<sup>53</sup> First Answer, 21 January 1774, in “An Answer, which the Oneida Indians gave to the Speech of Joseph Johnson,” DCA, WP 774121.

Later speeches hinted at some of the geopolitical benefits to their Oneida. In their second response to Johnson, given on the following Monday, the Oneida mentioned the example of the Tuscarora, the most recent tribe to be incorporated into the Six Nations, who had “sat together in peace” with the Oneida for a generation now. In their third response, they also warned Johnson and the New England Indians not to “harken to the invitations of other Nations, who may invite you to go further back.” The message was clear: the Oneida had a long tradition of welcoming refugee tribes, as long as those tribes lived in peace and dwelt where the Oneida had assigned them: on the borders of their territory.<sup>54</sup>

Johnson’s response, given in between the second and third Oneida speech, suddenly adopted much stronger Christian language – a tendency replicated in other writings and one that might indicate that the importance of the Christian identity of the New England Indians depended somewhat on the recipient. When writing to Christian missionaries, Occom and Johnson tended to portray the planned migration westward as part of a larger evangelization project. For example, Samson Occom wrote to the financial supporters of Moor’s school that several local indigenous groups were seeking to relocate to upstate New York. “Their main view,” he explained, “is to introduce the religion of Jesus Christ by their example among the benighted Indians in the Wilderness.”<sup>55</sup> He also wrote a letter to Wheelock describing the migration plan as a method of “blow[ing] the gospel trumpet in the wilderness,” adding “I hope the Lord is

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<sup>54</sup> Second Answer, 22 January 1774, and Third Answer, 24 January 1774, in “An Answer, which the Oneida Indians gave to the Speech of Joseph Johnson,” DCA, WP 774121.

<sup>55</sup> Samson Occom, letter to the Officers of the English Trust for Moor’s Indian Charity School, 10 Nov 1773 Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 107.

about to do great marvels.”<sup>56</sup> In a long letter to the Connecticut General Assembly, Johnson wrote that “the greatest part of the Indians, who propose to remove from hence shortly are well-disposed Indians, who are called Christians...and we all profess to have good purposes, good designs in our views, not only to better ourselves, but also to use our uttermost to endeavor to civilize and Christianize our fellow Natives.”<sup>57</sup> In describing the planned migration, Johnson and Occom seemed to write with their recipients’ viewpoints in mind, increasing the Christian content for readers who were particularly religious. It is no surprise, then, that after hearing the highly Christian Oneida speech, Johnson quickly reciprocated, opening his second speech by saying “Brethren, we ought to all adore God for his goodness to us from day to day.”<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, most of the time Occom and Johnson focused on material and economic reasons for the migration. When he was writing to the seven New England tribes, Johnson never mentioned the idea of a Christian utopia or suggested that the purpose of the emigration was to evangelize far-off tribes. Instead, he focused on the physical needs of the tribes and the prospects of a better future with greater material comfort. Similarly, when Johnson was fundraising among other government officials or secular groups, he similarly emphasized that the purpose of the migration was for the New England Indians to escape poverty. For example, in the spring of 1774, Johnson wrote to a group of “New Haven Gentlemen”: “It is well known that the New England Indians have but very little land, and what they have his very poor, which causes them to

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 March 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 110.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to the Connecticut Assembly, 2 June 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 235.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Johnson’s Second Speech to the Oneida, 24 January 1774, DCA, WP 774121.

turn every way to get a living, and when they have done their uttermost, they live but poorly.” With a keen ear for the popular political language of the day, as the American colonies grew increasingly frustrated with British policies, Johnson continued: “Unless the Indians use proper endeavors to keep in possession of their native liberty...in short time they will unavoidably be involved in that wretched state of perfect slavery, which every rational being dreads.” The purpose of the migration, therefore, was to “lead them into a land of liberty, where they and their children might live in peace.”<sup>59</sup> The nine indigenous men who met with Sir Johnson in the fall of 1773 had apparently emphasized their economic motivations as well; later records indicated that they had “represent[ed] that they were much straightened and reduced to such small pittances of land that they could no longer remain [in New England].”<sup>60</sup> Although the contents of Johnson’s initial communication with Sir William no longer exist, a letter from him to Sir William in 1774 described the New England Indians as “a poor remnant of several tribes bordering on the sea shore,” an image which probably dominated his earlier negotiations with Sir William as well.<sup>61</sup> Writing over a decade later, Samson Occom evidenced similar thoughts about the purpose of the migration. “As for the Indians scattered among the English, it is a gone case with them, they have been decreasing ever since the Europeans began to settle in this country,” he wrote.<sup>62</sup> Of course, this perspective would prove to be overly pessimistic: to this day, the Mohegan tribe maintains strong tribal unity and a presence in Connecticut,

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to the Gentlemen of New Haven, 21 February 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 225.

<sup>60</sup> Deed to Oneida lands, 4 October 1774, in Murray, 242.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Sir William Johnson, 8 July 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 238.

<sup>62</sup> Samson Occom, letter to John Bailey, 1784, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 121.

while many others similarly resisted erasure.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, Occom's description of the move generally reflected his mindset that Native people must seek happiness beyond the bounds of New England colonies. As he wrote when asked to give counsel on a law suit involving a white man and an indigenous man: "Is there no redress [illegible] for the Indians? ...I had rather be amongst the most Wild and uncultivated Indians in the western wilderness."<sup>64</sup> Christianity, of course, was not merely a rhetorical device for Occom and Johnson: their diaries clearly demonstrate the importance of Christianity to their own personal identities. Nevertheless, the changing position of Christianity with regard to the Brothertown migration plan indicates that perhaps material conditions, more than spiritual ones, motivated the New England Indians to move westward.

Whatever the New England Indians' primary motivation was, the combination of ethnic and religious affiliation with the Oneidas paved the way for a smooth negotiation. By the fourth day of the conference, the Oneida were ready to declare their consent to the plan. They offered the New England Indians a minimum of ten miles square on the borders of their own territory, and Johnson returned to New England to continue making preparations for the move. While the death of Sir William Johnson in 1774 may have slowed down the legal proceedings somewhat, by the fall of 1774 the Oneida officially deeded a section of land to the Mohegan, Montaukett, Groton Pequot, Stonington Pequot, Niantics, Narragansett, and Farmington Indians. The section was actually slightly larger

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<sup>63</sup> See Brooks, *The Common Pot*; Daniel R. Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780–1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Jean M O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). Moreover, Linford Fisher found that the migration to Brothertown probably involved less than 10% of New England's Native population. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening*, 182.

<sup>64</sup> Samson Occom, "Is There No Redress for the Indians?" 1788, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 128.

than originally planned – about twelve miles by thirteen miles – and immediately adjoined the settlement line set by the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, which had created a boundary between Native lands and white settlement. There were just two conditions: the Oneida reserved the right to hunt beaver on this land, and specified that only Native people – not anyone of mixed Afro-indigenous descent – would be permitted to live there.<sup>65</sup> While the beaver exception did not create controversy, the attempt to exclude Afro-indigenous people did, as will be discussed in chapter six.

In the winter of 1774-1775, Johnson worked to gather a group of people willing to migrate. By February 1775, he reported that about sixty men were ready to leave for upstate New York the following month.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately for Johnson, the spring of 1775 was a tumultuous time in New England, as rising tensions between the American colonists and the British erupted into violence. The New England Indians encountered new barriers to their proposed plan: suddenly the white inhabitants of Connecticut and Rhode Island began to demand that the Native people stay to help in the fight against the British. The general uncertainty of the times made it unlikely that indigenous people would be able to profit in any way from the land in New England that they were leaving behind (either by selling it or renting it).

Moreover, the plan itself began to appear more sinister to the American colonists. The governor of Connecticut worried that perhaps the British were planning an attack on the coastline while their indigenous allies would attack from the back country, and refused to grant Johnson and his party a pass for safe travel. According to Johnson, there

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<sup>65</sup> Treaty for Transfer of Land, 4 October 1774, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to John Rogers, 15 February 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 252.

was also a rumor circulating which suggested that “if the Eastern Indians and the Western Indians [the New England Indians and the Oneida] held a private correspondence together in these difficult times” they might all be “united to join his Majesty’s troops.”<sup>67</sup> All in all, Johnson noted that “it seemed to me a matter of great surprise that as the people of New England had got almost all our lands from us, and thereby obliged us to go elsewhere, should want to stop us now, when a year ago they wanted to get rid of us.”<sup>68</sup>

Faced with this opposition, most of Johnson’s hoped-for party of sixty were forced to stay home. In fact, only around sixteen individuals, seemingly all men, traveled from coastal New England to Oneida in the spring of 1775: Joseph Johnson led a group of around six Mohegans to Oneida in March, followed in April by David Fowler and two other Montaukett Indians, as well as Samuel Niles and six other Narragansets.<sup>69</sup> Samson Occom wished the travelers well but remained in Mohegan.<sup>70</sup> Within a few months, however, most of the New England Indians had left Oneida – apparently just to “visit their friends, and to move up parts of their families that were left behind.”<sup>71</sup>

In the end, however, the migration project would be postponed until after the end of the Revolutionary War. Johnson would spend the rest of 1775 and the spring of 1776 trying to get the support of the newly independent New York Congress, Connecticut

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<sup>67</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Colonel Guy Johnson, 25 March 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 258.

<sup>68</sup> Joseph Johnson, "Address at Guy Park," 25 March 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 255.

<sup>69</sup> While Brothertown would eventually become a tribal identity in and of itself, it seems clear from the way that the travel party was listed that tribal origin still had an impact on the organization of the initial move: Joseph Johnson leading the Mohegans, David Fowler leading the Montauketts, and Samuel Niles leading the Narragansetts. See Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 259n, and David Fowler, letter to Colonel Guy Johnson, 8 April 1775, in *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>70</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Joseph Johnson, 14 April 1775, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 111.

<sup>71</sup> Oneida tribe, letter to the New England Provinces, 19 June 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 264.

Assembly, and New Hampshire Assembly – as well as a personal letter of recommendation from George Washington, who hoped that Johnson would ensure that the Oneida did not take up arms against the Americans. Sometime between June 1776 and May 1777, Johnson either died or was killed. While the causes of his death are unknown, Johnson’s frequent journeys between New England and upstate New York forced him to travel through war-torn regions and put him at risk of being identified as a spy by either the British, Americans, or indigenous groups. In fact, when agreeing to help negotiate between the Oneida and the rebelling colonies, Johnson stated that this employment that might come “at hazard or expense of my own life”: simply being a Native man traveling on his own could raise suspicions.<sup>72</sup> Despite the apparent risk to life, Jacob Fowler served a similar role, being paid by the newly-formed United States Congress in the fall of 1776 for his “trouble in going to the Mohawk and Oneida Nations of Indians” with an eye to advancing the American agenda.<sup>73</sup> The members of the 1775 migration party, who had already arrived in Oneida when the war broke out, took refuge in Stockbridge, a nearby mission town.<sup>74</sup> In 1780, this group numbered at least six men, who asked the Connecticut Assembly for money to pay for a schoolteacher for their twenty-two children.<sup>75</sup> Numerous men from the New England tribes also served in the American forces during the Revolutionary War: at least seventeen Mohegan enlisted men (out of a tribe of around 190 people) died in the war, and at least fifteen Pequots (from a

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<sup>72</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to the New York Congress, 26 August 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 277.

<sup>73</sup> Resolution of the United States Congress, 19 September 1776, DCA, WP 776519.

<sup>74</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 91–92.

<sup>75</sup> Petition of Gideon Commue et al to the Connecticut Assembly, 11 October 1780, CSA, Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 2, 226.

similarly-sized community).<sup>76</sup> William DeLoss Love, in his 1899 family history of the Brothertown, specifically identified about half the men of who moved to Brothertown as veterans of the Revolutionary War – which, combined with the number of widows who moved to Brothertown and the possibility that others’ military service went unrecorded by Love, indicates an overall high level of participation in military combat.<sup>77</sup> In these circumstances, a massive migration northwest was hardly feasible.

Nevertheless, the idea persisted. In 1777, the Tunxis tribe, often known as the Farmington Indians, petitioned the Connecticut Assembly for permission to divide their communally-held land into individual plots. This petition originated in part to satisfy the needs of those preparing to migrate: “That some of the tribe have, and others are determined to, remove into the Mohawk country, and live in the greatest need of the whole benefit of their respective interests in said lands.”<sup>78</sup> John Adams of Farmington, one of the men who had traveled northward in 1775, had apparently remained in Connecticut and had already sold his portion of Farmington land by 1776.<sup>79</sup>

The Mohegan tribe seemed to become divided partly over the migration plans, complaining particularly about Samson Occom’s leadership. Zachary Johnson, along with five other Mohegans, wrote a letter of complaint to the Connecticut Assembly, claiming that Occom was “determined, as he says, to have the ordering of all the Indian

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<sup>76</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 117. See also Committee Report on Mohegan Petition, 22 May 1783, CSA, Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 2., 326; transcription available through the Yale Indian Papers Project, <http://yipp.yale.edu/annotated-transcription/digcoll2084>.

<sup>77</sup> Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 335-367. Love included information on thirty-five men whose birthdates indicated that they would have been in their late teens or twenties during the Revolutionary War. Fourteen of those he identified specifically as Revolutionary War soldiers. For several of the others, Love had only basic information, leaving open the possibility that those men also served.

<sup>78</sup> Petition of the Tunxis Indians, 19 May 1777, CSA Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 2, 196.

<sup>79</sup> Memorial of Hezekiah Wadsworth regarding land of John Adams, 13 October 1776, CSA, Indian Series, Series 2, Vol 2, 109a.

concerns, especially the rent of our lands.”<sup>80</sup> Over the next few years, both Zachary Johnson and Occom would submit lists of “true Mohegans” to the Connecticut Assembly, asking that only those on their lists be allowed a voice in Mohegan affairs. (Unsurprisingly, the two lists were entirely different.) When the Connecticut Assembly intervened in 1783, their investigation revealed that the Mohegan tribe had divided along old lines: Johnson had wanted to work with Connecticut during the land rights conflicts of the eighteenth century, while Occom had supported legal measures against the colony. While the Connecticut Assembly declined to expel Occom from Mohegan lands as Johnson had desired, they generally agreed that Johnson and not Occom should be viewed as the tribe’s leader.<sup>81</sup> This episode only served to confirm Occom’s belief that there was no future for him in Connecticut. As he wrote to a friend in 1784, “As for the Indians scattered among the English, it is a gone case with them, they have been decreasing ever since the Europeans began to settle this country.”<sup>82</sup> War may have put a halt to the practical steps needed for removal, but the idea itself remained alive.

Finally, in the summer of 1782, several Brothertown men who had taken refuge in Stockbridge, Massachusetts during the war travelled back to their tract in Oneida country to clear out the land and rebuild the settlement.<sup>83</sup> In the spring of 1783, the move to New York began in earnest. Some fifty people arrived in 1783, mainly those who had been

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<sup>80</sup> Memorial of Zachary Johnson et al, 18 October 1774, CSA, Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 2, 314.

<sup>81</sup> Committee Report on Mohegan Petition, 22 May 1783, CSA, Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 2, 326; transcription available through the Yale Indian Papers Project, <http://yipp.yale.edu/annotated-transcription/digcoll2084>.

<sup>82</sup> Samson Occom, letter to John Bailey, 1784, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 121.

<sup>83</sup> Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 247.

living in Stockbridge, with plans for another hundred to follow in 1784.<sup>84</sup> By late summer 1784, Occom could mention at least three names of people he knew who were traveling to Oneida, bringing letters for him to those who had already moved, and in general believed that large groups of Niantics, Narragansetts, and Montauketts were “getting ready to move up into that country as fast as they can.”<sup>85</sup> In the fall of 1785, Occom himself traveled to the new settlement. His description of the arrival in his journal acts as a perfect metaphor for the struggle to establish the new community and the hope for the future that it offered:

*Monday, October 24:* Some time after breakfast, David Fowler and I set off to go through the woods to our Indians’ new settlements and presently after we set off it began to rain and it rained all the way, not very hard. And it was extremely bad muddy riding, and the creeks were very high, and some places very mirely, and we were overtake with night before we got in, and some places were very dark where hemlock trees were [and] our eyes did us but little good. We traveled about a mile in the dark, and then we arrived at David’s house. As we approached the house I heard a melodious singing. A number were together singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we went in amongst them, and they all took hold of my hand one by one with joy and gladness from the greatest to the least, and we sat down awhile. And then they began to sing again, and some time after, I gave them a few words of exhortation, and then concluded with prayer, and then went to sleep quietly. The Lord be praised for his great goodness to us.<sup>86</sup>

Despite all the difficulties, Occom had arrived in a place where he could freely worship God with his Indian brethren, in the manner of their choosing. A few

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<sup>84</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 122; see also Samuel Kirkland, letter to James Bowdoin, 10 Mar 1784, Hamilton College Library Digital Collections, Samuel Kirkland Papers, reference # yhm-arc-kir-085c.

<sup>85</sup> Samson Samson, letter to Benjamin Garrett, 21 August 1784, and Samson Occom, letter to Solomon Welles, 26 Sept 1784, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 123, 125.

<sup>86</sup> Journal of Samson Occom, 24 October 1785, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 306.

weeks later, the inhabitants of the new settlement gathered to officially organize themselves into a “body politic” and chose a name for their town: Brothertown.<sup>87</sup>

### **Gender and the Founding of Brothertown**

As with the foundation of the Cacicas’ Convent in Oaxaca, definitions and rhetoric surrounding gender played an important role in the creation of Brothertown. Unlike the Cacicas’ Convent, however, Brothertown was from the start intended as a community for both men and women, and therefore discussions of both masculinity and femininity proved crucial for defining what sort of place Brothertown was to be. The men of Brothertown – particularly David Fowler, Joseph Johnson, Samson Occom – offered specific definitions of indigenous masculinity that ran counter to Anglo-American perspectives prevalent on the eastern seaboard. In fact, they defined Brothertown *primarily* as a place where Native men could fulfill certain ideals of manhood, specifically being an honorable man who worked hard, kept his promises, and loved his wife. Eventually, they began to define masculinity as encompassed by the move to Brothertown: all male Native persons who joined the movement were considered “true men,” while those who stayed behind were not.

In contrast, women’s roles within Brothertown were less frequently discussed. Nevertheless, in many ways the continuation of women’s traditional Algonquian roles undergirded the move to Brothertown: matrilineal kinship networks and female leadership and authority, particularly in spiritual matters. The Brothertown men also hoped that the new community would be a place where Native women would adopt certain Anglo-American gender norms, such as managing male emotions and practicing

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<sup>87</sup> Journal of Samson Occom, 7 November 1785, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom*, 308.

Anglo-American domesticity, but evidence shows that at least some women resisted these new norms. Instead, the women moving to Brothertown seem to have hoped that the construction of a new community, farther away from the impacts of colonialism, would help them strengthen kinship networks and their influence over family members.

### **Masculinity and Brothertown**

It is no surprise that the Brothertown men would focus on redefining and achieving manhood for themselves, given that they spent their formative years living in a colonial system that refused to acknowledge them as full-fledged adults with all the resultant privileges and expectations of men. The European imposition of paternalism often constrained Native peoples' interactions with missionaries or government authorities. For example, Eleazar Wheelock often called Johnson, Fowler, and Occom his children, even when they were grown men. Even in a letter encouraging Occom to become a minister, Wheelock addressed him with fatherly superiority: "Dear child, watch against pride and self-esteem."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Native men often had to deploy this rhetoric when asking for protection or favors from colonial governments or Euro-American ministers. In 1760, for example, contested Mohegan sachem Ben Uncas turned to the Connecticut Legislature for help in defending his claim to Mohegan leadership, saying he and his council "seek upon ourselves under the paternal care of this assembly, and like Children when they are hurt, opposed, and wronged, fly to you our common Father for redress."<sup>89</sup> Similarly, David Fowler positioned himself as a "child" who wanted to "ask a favor...from a kind Father or Benefactor" when writing to Eleazar Wheelock.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Samson Occom, 3 April 1750, Connecticut Historical Society, James Bidwell Homer Autograph Collection, MS 95911.

<sup>89</sup> Memorial of Ben Uncas, 20 May 1760, CSA, Indian Series, Series 1, Vol 2, 103a-b.

<sup>90</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 13 May 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 102.

As historian Laura Murray points out, the paternalism that helped define the relationship between colonial officials and Native men was based in an underlying violence. Wheelock attempted to maintain his paternal authority over the students through affective discourse, the creation of debts, and reminders of loyalty, but this authority was buttressed by the physical violence used by other colonists to subjugate Indian populations.<sup>91</sup> By positioning themselves as children, indigenous men sought protection from the more violent displays of authority. Paternalism, however, had a dark side-effect. In an era when independence, self-rule, and economic self-determinism were increasingly becoming associated with masculinity, native men were discursively prevented from achieving this status.

In their negotiations with the Oneida for land, the Brothertown managed to shift their rhetorical positioning from children addressing fathers to younger brothers addressing older brothers. The political structure of the Six Nations, of whom the Oneida formed a part, relied on kinship networks, both real and fictive, to explain their origins and maintain their connections. While various combinations of relationships were used to explain the connections between the tribes, the Mohawks, Onondagas, and Senecas were often referred to as Fathers or Elder Brothers within the council networks, while the Oneidas, Cayugas, and Tuscaroras, who were later in joining the confederacy, were often called Younger Brothers or Sons. In negotiating with the Oneidas for a land grant, Joseph Johnson addressed them as his Elder Brethren, and concluded the negotiations by thanking the Oneida for “taking us to be your younger Brothers.”<sup>92</sup> The Oneida agreed

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<sup>91</sup> Laura Murray, “‘Pray Sir, Consider a Little:’ Rituals of Subordination and Strategies of Resistance in the Letters of Hezekiah Calvin and David Fowler to Eleazar Wheelock, 1764-1768,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 4, no. 2/3 (1992): 70.

<sup>92</sup> Joseph Johnson’s Address at Kanohaware, 20 January 1774, DCA, WP 774120.

that they would view the Brothertown as their younger brothers, but added a fuller description of the Brothertown's new place within the Iroquois Confederacy: "Brethren, we look upon you, as upon a Sixth Brother. We will tell you, of all your elder Brothers, the Oneida, Kiyogas [Cayugas], Nanticuks [Nanticokes], Tuscaroras, Todelehonas [Tutelos], these five are your elder brothers. But as for the Mohawks, Onondagas, and the Senecas they are our fathers, and they are your fathers."<sup>93</sup> The Brothertowns, therefore, would be incorporated into Iroquoian governance at roughly the same level as the "newer" tribes – the Oneidas, the Cayugas, and their dependents – but would still be considered younger even to those three, while the Mohawks, Senecas, and Onondagas would continue to have final authority. Adult masculinity, at least in the context of the Six Nations relationships, remained in the hands of the more established tribes.

Within the community of Brothertown itself, however, the founders emphasized that it would be a place where indigenous men would be freed from the limitations of colonial society, and able to act as full men. Their specific definitions of manhood, however, were still shaped by the prejudices that had governed their experiences in Connecticut, New York, and Rhode Island. For example, they described laziness as an unmanly quality, a common refrain among Anglo settlers as well.<sup>94</sup> In 1783, a year after Brothertown was founded, Occom wrote a draft of a document called "The Most Remarkable and Strange State, Situation, and Appearance of Indian Tribes in this Great Continent" in which he described the trials and tribulations of indigenous people in North

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<sup>93</sup> Answer of the Oneida Chiefs, 21 January 1774, DCA, WP 774121. The Tuscarora addition to the Iroquois Confederation in 1722, sponsored by the Oneida, is well-known; the Nanticokes, a small tribe from the Delaware/Maryland region, had also migrated to New York and joined the confederacy under Oneida sponsorship in the late 1740s. The Tutelos had been adopted into the confederacy by the Cayugas in 1753.

<sup>94</sup> See Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History*, 33.

America. In contrast to his analysis of the situation of “Negroes” in the region, which he blamed on the “tyrannical, cruel, and inhumane” oppression of their white slavers, Occom blamed Indians’ poverty on their own choices. “Indians...are universally poor. They have no notion of laying up much for the future,” he explained, “they all live from hand to mouth, and [are] wasteful and imprudent, both of time & substance.”<sup>95</sup> This critique of laziness was not part of a wholesale agreement with negative stereotypes about indigenous people: in the same writing, he defended his fellow Indians against accusations of lying, cheating, and stealing. When it came to work ethic, however, Occom seemed to agree with Anglo-American prejudice. David Fowler also invoked the trope of indigenous laziness when writing a report of his time as a missionary and schoolteacher to the Oneidas in 1765: “These [Oneida] men are the laziest crew I ever saw in all my days,” he wrote.<sup>96</sup> In short, Occom and Fowler, at least when writing to white audiences, seemed to agree that many Indian men were naturally lazy and unwilling to participate in the types of labor that marked Anglo masculinity.

However, they also emphasized that the male residents of Brothertown would break from the stereotype of laziness and dedicate themselves to hard work. Johnson promised that the members of Brothertown would “work like men.”<sup>97</sup> Occom also made sure to distinguish himself from other “lazy” Indians. In his second autobiography, written to respond to his critics after a fundraising tour of Great Britain, Occom spent a full paragraph explaining his rigorous schedule of work. “I took all opportunities to get

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<sup>95</sup> Samson Occom, “The Most Remarkable and Strange State, Situation, and Appearance of Indian Tribes in This Great Continent (1783)” in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 59.

<sup>96</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 24 June 1765, in McCallum, 96.

<sup>97</sup> Speech of Joseph Johnson to Colonel Guy Johnson, 25 March 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 257.

something to feed my family daily,” he argued, including planting corn, potatoes, and beans, fishing, hunting, and raising livestock – all this while keeping a school open daily.<sup>98</sup> Occom carefully constructed his self-image to show that he was able to fulfill Anglo-American understandings of masculinity, as the provider for his family and a dedicated worker. Productive labor, therefore, became an important definition of manliness for the newly-founded Brothertown community.

Secondly, Johnson in particular believed that being a man meant keeping one’s promises. When writing a letter to the seven New England tribes that would form part of Brothertown, he urged the recipients to prove their manliness by keeping their promises to send representatives to survey the Oneida land. “Be so good as to show yourselves men, for General Johnson expects us at his house last of this month,” he wrote to them.<sup>99</sup> When counting the number of men who had agreed to journey to New York in the spring of 1775, he noted that there were 58 who had told him they would go, and “in whose words I believe we may rely.”<sup>100</sup> Overall, Johnson seemed to agree with the general Anglo-American prejudice that indigenous men were not reliable. In a February 1774 letter to churchgoers in New Haven, Johnson explained that he could not count on Indians to donate to the Brothertown project, because “to put confidence in Indians, is like a man’s leaning on a broken staff.”<sup>101</sup> Evidently Johnson found this metaphor either pleasing or highly effective in his fundraising, because a few months later, he repeated it,

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<sup>98</sup> Samson Occom, “Autobiographical Narrative, Second Draft (September 17, 1768)” in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 57.

<sup>99</sup> Farmington Indians, letter to Indian Brethren at Mohegan, Nihantuck, Pequit, Stonington, Narraganset, and Montauk, 13 October 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 199.

<sup>100</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Rev. Dr. Rodgers, 15 February 1775, DCA, WP 775165.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to the inhabitants of New Haven, 21 February 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 225.

but with more detail: “Supposing I should put my trust in the Indians, I should be like unto a man that is very weary, who designing to ease, or rest himself a little, leans upon the Staff, but behold the Staff is rotten, and breaks, then down he tumbles.”<sup>102</sup> In both cases, Johnson went on to explain that part of the problem with raising money from among the future Brothertown members was their current state of poverty, not necessarily their unreliability. Nevertheless, his broken staff metaphor implies a certain level of untrustworthiness among the Indians. The staff might have appeared to be a reliable means of support, but it was rotten at the core, just as Indians might promise to give money to the Brothertown project, and then fail to deliver. Undergirded by colonial rhetoric that portrayed Indians as shiftless, manipulative, and deceitful, Johnson’s letters seem to support the idea that indigenous men had work especially hard to portray themselves as truthful and keep their promises in order to achieve manhood.

Closely related to the concept of trustworthiness, of course, was the idea of credit. As historian Jane Kamensky has highlighted, in the absence of a standardized system, money lending in early America was based primarily on reputation and character. Therefore, being known as a reliable, trustworthy person was an essential tool for gaining the type of financial support needed for a project like Brothertown – and a difficult status for indigenous men to achieve in the face of growing racial prejudice. Often, they were forced to rely on the support of white men for purchasing power. Occom’s letters are full of references to letters of credit bestowed upon him by various missionary societies, and explanations of how he needed to show these documents to skeptical merchants,

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<sup>102</sup> Johnson, Joseph, letter to the Connecticut Assembly, 2 June 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 223.

innkeepers, and ship captains who were demanding payment.<sup>103</sup> Sometimes, however, even these systems failed. When Samson Occom travelled to England, for example, his wife found herself facing poverty and unable to buy food. Previously, Occom had purchased items on credit from a local trader, Gershom Breed of Norwich, Connecticut, and either the Connecticut branch of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge or Wheelock himself would pay the charges. In Occom's absence, however, Wheelock had stopped paying the account, and Breed stopped allowing Mary to make charges to the account. Mary had to write directly to Wheelock and ask him to intervene. "I sent to Mr. Breed for corn," she informed Wheelock, "and he could not let me have any."<sup>104</sup> After a fight with Eleazar Wheelock, David Fowler vowed to repay him for all the expenses of his education, so that Fowler could not be considered to be in his debt anymore. "I can get payment as well as a white man," he proudly declared.<sup>105</sup> Shortly thereafter, however, he wrote to Wheelock again with an apology and a request for further funding. As Fowler quickly discovered, it was not so easy to navigate colonial economic systems without backing from a white benefactor.

Although they originally identified characteristics like industry and trustworthiness as qualities of manhood, the Brothertown founders soon began to portray participation in the Brothertown movement itself as a mark of manliness. In 1773, Occom described Johnson and Fowler's preaching among the New England tribal communities as a hopeful sign that "the Lord is about to raise the young men to do great things by

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<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Samson Occom, letters to Eleazar Wheelock, 12 May 1762 and August 1764, and Samson Occom, letter to John Thorton, [no day/month] 1776, all in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 69, 72, 113.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 15 July 1767, DCA, WP 767415.

<sup>105</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 26 August 1776, in McCallum, *Letters*, 103.

them in their day and generation.”<sup>106</sup> In other words, Occom believed that through the Christian example of himself and his compatriots, indigenous manhood in New England would be renewed. A few years later, Johnson wrote to Eleazar Wheelock to tell him that he had recruited nearly sixty men from coastal New England tribes to create the initial settlement in Oneida territory. These men, he added, were “noble spirited Indians who will distinguish themselves from the lazy crew that refuses the good offers made to them in these latter days.”<sup>107</sup> Acceptance of Christianity, as well as dedication to the Brothertown movement, made these indigenous men noble in Johnson’s eyes. The reference to the “latter days” also had two levels of meaning. While Johnson might have just meant “recently,” the phrase also implied the end of indigenous peoples’ settlement on the East Coast, thereby participating in what Jean M. O’Brien calls “the narrative construct of Indian extinction.”<sup>108</sup> By placing himself and his companions among the class of “noble Indians,” however, Johnson hearkened back to a trope that had begun to disappear from colonial discourse, that of the proud, natural, admirable Indian. The Christian Indians who were moving to Brothertown, Johnson argued, were men deserving of respect.

In fact, Johnson began to define indigenous masculinity exclusively through a man’s willingness to move to Brothertown. In a 1773 letter to the Mohegans, Niantics, Pequots, Narragansetts, and Montauketts, Johnson and a group of eight other men, representing the Farmington Tunxis, relied almost entirely on gendered rhetoric to encourage the tribes to participate in the foundation of Brothertown. The purpose of the

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<sup>106</sup> Samson Occom, letter to the officers of the English trust for Moor’s Indian Charity School, 10 November 1773, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 108.

<sup>107</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 Feb 1775, DCA, WP 775164.

<sup>108</sup> O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, xxiv.

letter was to notify the tribes that a meeting had been scheduled with Guy Johnson, Indian Superintendent, to discuss a move of the New England tribes to upstate New York. Johnson requested that the tribes send a representative along with him to engage in the negotiations. Specifically, Johnson asked for men: “We beg that you would by all means send a man, out of each tribe, to seek a country for our brethren.” Beyond specifying that participation in this meeting would be limited to men, Johnson also envisioned a completely male audience for his letter, directing all of his comments to men. “Let us take courage, friends,” he wrote, “and step forward like men.” Later on, Johnson made his envisioned audience even clearer: “Seeing that you are men, and it is to be hoped wise men, consider of things, and do that which is right.” Throughout the letter, masculinity remained the primary theme: Johnson made three references to Christianity or God, one reference to indigeneity (calling the recipients of the letter “Indian Brethren”) and four references to masculinity. While Johnson’s other writings demonstrate his commitment to both Christianity and indigenous solidarity, it seems that his primary goal for the new community was that it would be a place to achieve full masculinity. Or, at least, he believed that references to manhood would be the best way to convince fellow indigenous men to make the move to New York.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, when the Revolutionary War broke out and caused the planned move to Oneida to fall apart, Johnson was quick to blame this failure on a lack of masculinity. Writing to Samson Occom, Johnson expressed his deep disappointment that the fears over war breaking out had caused many potential Brothertown settlers to turn back. “I am almost ready to say that I will undertake no more for such unthankful, ungrateful, and unmanly Indians,” he complained. “But though I

thus speak, pity, love and zeal doth glow in this heart of mine, and I will still according to my ability, help my poor Indian Brethren in these parts. But Oh! that Indians were men.”<sup>109</sup> In this case, Johnson ignored any other factors that might have caused the men in his group to return home – perhaps a desire to protect their families, or even enlist in the army, all options that would typically be seen as an expression of masculinity. Instead, Johnson interpreted these decisions as a failure of masculine courage and steadfastness. Instead of the Brothertown project being a way of creating one particular space for indigenous men to achieve independence and enact their own masculinity, Johnson had come to see it as the only way that manhood could be attained.

Indeed, one small example demonstrates the potential of a place like Brothertown for indigenous men. Traveling throughout Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York in the 1760s and 1770s, Occom, Johnson, Fowler, and many other Christian Indians sought passes from white authority figures in order to confirm their identity and ensure their safe passage in a time when other whites might suspect them as enemy figures or criminals. (The risk of traveling without a pass was high, as Johnson’s mysterious death shows.) In June 1761, for example, Occom met in person with General Jeffrey Amherst in Albany, New York, and requested a pass. Amherst gave him “a very good pass indeed,” Occom noted, which explained Occom’s travels as a missionary preacher and urged any army officer to “give him any aid or assistance that he might need.”<sup>110</sup> Wheelock similarly wrote several passes for his students who were sent out to missionary fields. In the early 1780s, however, after Occom had moved to Brothertown,

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<sup>109</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Samson Occom, 25 May 1775, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 232.

<sup>110</sup> Journal of Samson Occom, 29 June 1761, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 261.

he himself began to write passes and letters of recommendation for other indigenous men. In one case, he asked “all Christian people” to provide for Benjamin Garret, an elderly Pequot man traveling from coastal New England to Oneida. A few years later, he wrote a letter of recommendation urging Jedediah Chapman to accept John Quinney, a Stockbridge, into his school. Rather than needing to rely on the reputation and beneficence of white protectors, Occom was now boldly exerting influence of his own.

For their part, the women of Brothertown left few written records of their perspectives on indigenous manhood. Only one recorded episode truly shows female support for the new definition of masculinity espoused by the male Brothertown founders. Shortly after his marriage to Hannah Garrett Fowler, David Fowler clashed with Eleazar Wheelock over the cost of the clothing he had purchased to outfit himself and Hannah: Wheelock thought the clothes Fowler had bought were “too good and too costly” for a Native man. In response, Hannah apparently accompanied David as he stormed away from the school, indicating that perhaps she agreed that David deserved better clothing than Wheelock’s parsimony would have allowed – and that she supported David’s assertion of his equality with white men.<sup>111</sup> For most of the Brothertown women, however, the archival record is fairly silent on the topic of masculinity.

### **Brothertown and Femininity**

The definition of femininity did not receive as much attention as masculinity in the rhetoric surrounding the foundation of Brothertown. Although Anglo-American gender norms challenged indigenous women’s political authority in particular, in many other ways Algonquian women managed to preserve much of their traditional roles

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<sup>111</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 26 August 1766, and Eleazar Wheelock, letter to David Fowler, 26 August 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 103, 104–5.

despite the advent of colonialism. The daily work of Algonquian women focused primarily on the household and agriculture, and while the ideals of Anglo-American domesticity may have constrained indigenous women to a smaller plot of land for gardening, it was not as dramatic a shift as the expected transformation from hunting to agriculture for indigenous men. Moreover, as Kathleen Brown argues, much of the “adaptive capacity” of Algonquian cultures relied on female initiative.<sup>112</sup> This ability to incorporate traditional skills into the new colonial context was perhaps most clearly demonstrated by indigenous participation in New England markets. Algonquian women often “traded products of their farms and common lands, including cranberries, wood, butter, and cheese” and also wove baskets for sale, adapting their traditional agricultural and weaving techniques to the new economic conditions.<sup>113</sup> As I have argued in Chapter 2, Native girls and women also managed to navigate patriarchal relationships with missionaries more successfully than men. On the other hand, the poverty faced by coastal New England indigenous groups impacted women as well as men, often forcing individuals to move in search of employment – a dispersal which complicated traditional matrilineal kinship networks.<sup>114</sup> The women who moved to Brothertown often indicated that they did so in the hopes of maintaining or achieving closer contact with their children and kin, perhaps an indication of a deeper desire to preserve matrilineal family structures.

In fact, matrilineal relationships proved to be a key element in constructing the initial nucleus of the Brothertown movement. Samson Occom, David Fowler, and Joseph

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<sup>112</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, “The Anglo-Algonquian Gender Frontier,” in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge Press, 1995), 27.

<sup>113</sup> Mandell, *Tribes, Race, History*, 32.

<sup>114</sup> Men often traveled on whaling ships, while women worked as domestic servants in cities and towns. See Mandell, 30, 139.

Johnson were all related to each other through marriage. Occom's wife, Mary Fowler Occom, was David Fowler's older sister. Mary and David, as well as their younger brother Jacob, had attended Occom's school among the Montauketts of Long Island, and all three siblings would end up moving to Brothertown. The two Fowler brothers, David and Jacob, married Pequot women: Hannah Garrett and Esther Poquiantup, strengthening relationships between the Pequot and Montaukett tribes. Another female connection may have helped strengthen the Brothertown founders' influence with Sir William Johnson: Molly Brant, an influential Mohawk woman and Johnson's consort, had a brother, Joseph Brant, who attended Wheelock's school. The two of them maintained a correspondence while Joseph was in Connecticut in the 1760s alongside Occom and Joseph Johnson, which would have likely increased Sir William Johnson's familiarity with the men as well.<sup>115</sup>

Samson and Mary Occom's daughters would also prove particularly important contributors to the growth of the Brothertown movement. Their second-oldest daughter, Tabitha, married Joseph Johnson. For his part, Joseph Johnson became Samson and Mary's son-in-law after his marriage to their daughter, Tabitha. After Johnson's untimely death, Tabitha never moved to Brothertown, but two more of Samson and Mary's daughters did. Olive Occom (Mohegan/Brothertown) married Solomon Adams (Tunxis/Brothertown) and Christina Occom married Anthony Paul (Narragansett/Brothertown); both the Adams and Paul families would become highly influential at Brothertown. In contrast, Samson Occom's sons did not follow in his footsteps by working to strengthen pan-tribal Christian communities; two of their four

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<sup>115</sup> See Isabel Thompson Kelsay, *Joseph Brant, 1743-1807: Man of Two Worlds* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 88–89.

sons died relatively young, a third remained in Mohegan rather than moving to Brothertown, and the fourth died shortly after arriving in upstate New York, leaving his land to his widow. The kinship networks that helped constitute Brothertown and cemented relationships across various tribal identities were formed primarily by women.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, Brothertown men and women differed in their strategies for strengthening these relationships. When courting Native women, the future founders of Brothertown often employed the romantic language common to eighteenth-century Anglo-American discourse. “My heart is fixed upon her” wrote Joseph Johnson about his future wife Tabitha, “...and I have promised by my all to have her.”<sup>117</sup> Although David Fowler courted two other indigenous women before marrying Hannah, he wrote with the same romantic passion about each one of his potential matches. “I can’t help loving her,” he wrote about Amy Johnson.<sup>118</sup> A year later, he described a similar level of preoccupation with Hannah Poquiantup.<sup>119</sup> This theme of strong affective connections carried over into their correspondence with their wives, as well. Both Johnson and Samson Occom had to spend a great deal of time traveling in support of their missions, and in their letters they described how difficult this separation was for them. “I want greatly to see you and to converse with your dear person,” Johnson wrote to Tabitha.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> See Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 335–67 (“Family History of the Brothertown Indians”); Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 413–26 (“Individuals Named in Occom’s Writings”).

<sup>117</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Samson Occom, 1 October 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 192.

<sup>118</sup> Fowler, David, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 2 May 1765, in McCallum, *Letters*, 89.

<sup>119</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 13 May 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 102.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Tabitha Occom, 5 November 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 202.

Similarly, Occom told his wife Mary that their physical separation affected him so much that he could not “refrain from tears whilst I am writing.”<sup>121</sup> In a perspective that echoed Anglo-American norms regarding male and female intellect, Johnson in particular seemed to believe that his level of devotion was beyond his wife’s capacity for comprehension. “If you knew how you were beloved by me,” he wrote to her, “you would wonder.”<sup>122</sup> Johnson, Fowler, and Occom seem to have believed that written proclamations of deep love would help strengthen their romantic relationships.

The women of Brothertown, however, appear to have been unimpressed with the male turn towards affective language, and preferred instead to solidify relationships based on personal interactions. For example, Hezekiah Calvin expressed “great affection” through his speeches to Mary Secuter, but she focused more on his behavior, which led to her concerns about his constancy. “I think he has no more regard for me than he has for any other girl,” she wrote.<sup>123</sup> The flowery language of adoration was not as important to Mary as Calvin’s lack of steadfastness. In a letter to her parents, Olive (Occom) Adams eschewed the affective language so often used by her father and other male Indian contemporaries, addressing Samson and Mary as her “honorable parents” and signing her letter simply as “your dutiful daughter.” In the letter, she asked for her parents to visit more often, and specifically requested that her mother bring cloth to help her repair a cloak. As chapter 6 will elaborate, weaving and sewing would become a primary avenue of indigenous women’s female comradery, education, and profit-earning at Brothertown;

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<sup>121</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Mary Fowler Occom, 1767, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 81.

<sup>122</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Tabitha Occom, 5 November 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 202.

<sup>123</sup> Hezekiah Calvin, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 14 August 1767, in McCallum, *Letters*, 57; Mary Secuter, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 16 November 1767, in *Ibid*, 67.

the letter from Adams to her parents is an early example of how women bonded over the production of cloth. At least occasionally, Brothertown men acknowledged the importance of these in-person connections. For example, David Fowler did not step to visit with his sister, Mary Fowler Occom, on his way to Oneida territory in 1766, and later wrote her a note of apology. The type of emotional language present in Occom and Johnson's communications with their wives was absent from Fowler's letter, but he did explain that he was "very sorry I could not come down and see you before I came away." He asked that Mary "won't take it hard any longer. I suppose you did."<sup>124</sup> Fowler seemed to recognize the importance of in-person visits for maintaining relationships, and realized that Mary was probably angry with him for not coming to see her. According to Mary Fowler Occom, Mary Secuter, and Olive Adams, it was actions, not affect-laden correspondence, that cemented relationships – between siblings, parents and children, and even courting couples.

Brothertown men also frequently expressed women's roles in terms of what constituted a good wife. This focus may have stemmed from the strict monogamy required within marriage by Christian orthodoxy. Most of the Brothertown founders came from Algonquian peoples – such as Narragansett, Pequot, Mohegan, and others – which sometimes permitted men to marry multiple women.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, if a marriage proved unsatisfactory to one or both parties, husband and wife could separate and remarry

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<sup>124</sup> David Fowler, letter to Mary Fowler Occom, 2 December 1766, Connecticut Historical Society, Samson Occom Papers, folder 17, available online at <http://hdl.handle.net/11134/40002:380>.

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, quotes from Roger Williams and Daniel Gookin in Moondancer, *A Cultural History of the Native Peoples of Southern New England: Voices from Past and Present* (Boulder, CO: Bauu Press, 2006), 124.

without repercussion.<sup>126</sup> In contrast, Christian missionaries emphasized that marriage was supposed to be not only monogamous, but lifelong.<sup>127</sup> In fact, this life of fidelity could begin as soon as courtship reached a serious level: for example, David Fowler declared that he would “keep clear from all girls whatsoever” as soon as he was engaged.<sup>128</sup> For some men, sexual continence was apparently a struggle: Hezekiah Calvin explained that tantalizing hope of being married (and, presumably, the idea of being able to perform the marital act), was “a strong motive to get me into intemperance.”<sup>129</sup> The strict rules surrounding Christian marriage meant that the future founders of Brothertown had to carefully chose a marriage partner who would be a support to them for the rest of their lives.

In general, men like Joseph Johnson, David Fowler, and Samson Occom defined a “good wife” as a woman who could fulfil traditional Anglo gender roles, working within the domestic sphere. In a letter regarding potential marriage to Amy Johnson, Fowler wrote to Wheelock en route to his new station as a missionary in Oneida country. In the letter, he not only asked for Wheelock’s blessing on his courtship of Amy, but also emphasized that he needed a wife well-trained in domesticity in order to support him on his mission. Without a wife, he explained, he found it “very hard to live here...for I am obliged to eat with dogs.”<sup>130</sup> Although he later acknowledged that Oneida women were preparing meals for him, he criticized their attempts as not up to Anglo domestic

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<sup>126</sup> Samson Occom, “Account of the Montauk Indians on Long Island (1761)” in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 48.

<sup>127</sup> Kristina Bross and Hilary E. Wyss, eds., *Early Native Literacies in New England: A Documentary and Critical Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 110.

<sup>128</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 2 May 1765, in McCallum, *Letters*, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Hezekiah Calvin, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, March 1768, in *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>130</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 15 June 1765, in *Ibid*, 94.

standards. Later, once he was married to Hannah Garrett, he described his marriage mainly in terms of its benefit to him. “I find very great profit by having the other rib joined to my body,” he wrote to Wheelock in December, 1766, a few months after marrying Hannah Garrett, “for it has taken away all my house work from me. but I had very hard spell getting it up here.”<sup>131</sup> The term “other rib” was a reference to the biblical description of Eve, the first woman, being formed out of Adam’s rib – but it also had the effect of rhetorically replacing Fowler’s wife by an inanimate object, rendering her into an agency-less, gender-neutral object (“it”) whose sole purpose was doing housework.

This definition of wifehood, however, faced two challenges. First of all, material realities made it difficult for Native women to practice the type of Anglo-American domesticity that their husbands sought. For example, when David Fowler lived in Oneida as a missionary, he was dissatisfied with the work of the Oneida women, despite the fact that they prepared his meals for him. He complained to Eleazar Wheelock that he missed specific food items: “Mrs. Wheelock’s bread and milk, little sweet cake[s] and good boiled meat.”<sup>132</sup> Once he married Hannah, however, his complaints over the quality of food ceased. Apparently, her years at the Moor’s Indian Charity School had taught her to cook in a way that pleased Fowler. When Native women did not have access to white instructresses in Anglo-American domesticity, however, Brothertown men had to step in to fill that role. For example, while on his tour of England and Scotland, Samson Occom sent some gifts back to his wife Mary, with clear instructions on how they were to be used. The shipment included a coffee-pot and three brass hooks, and Occom explained that “you must never put the pot on the fire” and the brass hooks were for hanging

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<sup>131</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 2 December 1766, in McCallum, *Letters*, 106.

<sup>132</sup> David Fowler, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 15 June 1765, in *Ibid.*, 94.

clothes.<sup>133</sup> The gift of a coffee-pot and clothes-hangers required Occom to learn how these household items worked before he could explain their usage to Mary and incorporate them into his daily life. In doing so, Occom himself inverted the marital normal that he was trying to impose. Changing material conditions impacted the ways in which indigenous men and women could embody Anglo-American gender norms.

Secondly, indigenous women seemed to resist the imposition of these new domestic standards, and maintained many traditional practices. From the writings of missionaries who visited the Occom home, we know that Mary Fowler Occom did not fully embrace Anglo-American domesticity or culture. David McClure, a white student who had been a colleague of Occom's at Moor's, described his visit to the Occom family home in his diary. According to McClure, Occom "wished to live in English style" and provided a feather bed for his guests in his two-story home; but "his wife, who was of the Montauk tribe, retained a fondness for her Indian customs." For example, she wore "Indian garments" rather than English-style clothing. Moreover, in the presence of company at least, she spoke with Occom in her native language (presumably Mohegan), "even when he spoke to her in English."<sup>134</sup> Several letters written by Mary Fowler Occom indicate that she certainly understood English and was able to write it, so the fact that she did not speak English in front of McClure was clearly a choice she made. In fact, McClure believed that Occom wished to assert more authority over his wife and children, but was unable to force his wife into speaking English. Of course, McClure was an outside observer of the Occom marriage; we don't know if Occom ever indicated that he

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<sup>133</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Mary Fowler Occom, 11 March 1766, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 76.

<sup>134</sup> David McClure and Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Diary of David McClure, Doctor of Divinity, 1748-1820* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1899), 192, <http://archive.org/details/diaryofdavidmcl00mclu>.

was displeased with Mary's choice of spoken language. Nevertheless, the household dynamics seem to indicate that Mary preferred to maintain her Montaukett traditions, rather than adopting Anglo norms. Similarly, Joseph Johnson suggested that coastal New England women could support the men traveling to Oneida to negotiate land rights by making *yokeg*, a traditional Mohegan food of dried and ground corn flour made for travelers.<sup>135</sup> In terms of food and language, it seems to have been the women who stayed closer to Algonquian traditions.

Moreover, both Brothertown men and women seemed to agree that the marital relationships in their community would not totally subvert female agency, as strictly a patriarchal model of marriage would have done. Although the men of Brothertown often spoke about women as mere objects of their affection or reliable domestic help, it is clear that the women also had the ability to express their own opinions and make their own decisions as well. For example, when Joseph Johnson was trying to unite the seven New England tribes and encourage them to join the Brothertown movement, he specifically mentioned that the women had to be convinced of the benefits of this plan as well. "Try to get the good-will of the women," he urged.<sup>136</sup> Occom also wrote to an unnamed female friend, urging her to try to influence her husband to agree to come visit him: "I should take it very kindly, if...you would persuade your husband to come over," he wrote.<sup>137</sup> The

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<sup>135</sup> Farmington Indians, letter to Indian Brethren at Mohegan, Nihantuck, Pequit, Stonington, Narraganset, and Montauk, 13 October 1773, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 200; Lucianne Lavin, *Connecticut's Indigenous Peoples: What Archaeology, History, and Oral Traditions Teach Us About Their Communities and Cultures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 195.

<sup>136</sup> Farmington Indians, letter to Indian Brethren at Mohegan, Nihantuck, Pequit, Stonington, Narraganset, and Montauk, 13 October 1773, Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 199.

<sup>137</sup> Samson Occom, letter to unknown recipient, 9 June 1770, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 93.

Brothertown men understood the importance of female influence and persuasion within their families and tribes.

In other ways as well, Brothertown men both echoed missionary stereotypes about indigenous women while also stretching those perspectives to incorporate more traditionally Native practices. For example, the Brothertown founders assumed that Christianity came more naturally to women than to men. In 1787, Occom compiled a selection of over one-hundred English-language hymns for church congregations, which was used with regularity at Brothertown. None of the hymns identify an author. While there is evidence that a few of the hymns were written by Occom himself, the majority were probably written by others and sung in Congregationalist churches across New England in the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless, the selection of certain hymns certainly reflected Occom's deeper world-view and theology.<sup>138</sup> Within this collection, there were two hymns that referenced women specifically. Both songs are a dialogue between men and women, in which men wonder why the women are so happy after having rejected worldly affairs, and the women explain that they have done so because they have accepted Christianity. "Hymn XCIII: A Sacred Dialogue," begins: "Tell us O Women, we would know/Whither so fast ye move?" In response, the women explain, "We, call'd to leave the World below,/Are seeking one above." Through several more stanzas, the women proclaim that they are travelling to heaven, and will not seek any rest until they arrive. In this case, the women serve as spiritual guides for the men, relying on their purity and exemplary devotion to inspire their male interrogators. Another hymn, "XXXIX: A Dialogue Between Pilgrims," was annotated to indicate that men and women

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<sup>138</sup> For more on this hymnal, see Joanna Brooks, "Six Hymns by Samson Occom," *Early American Literature* 38, no. 1 (March 2003): 67–87.

should alternate singing verses. For the first few verses, the men once again wonder why the women are so dedicated to their pilgrimage. Are they not tempted by the earthly comforts of friends, treasures, or “sensual things”? No, the women respond; the things of this world cannot satisfy the longing of their hearts for heaven, and no treasure of gold or silver can replace the treasured sacrifice of Christ. (The women’s verses do not seem to directly acknowledge the temptation of sensuality, but they do comment that Christ alone can give them “bliss.”) Unlike Hymn XCIII, in which the men constantly ask the women about their faith, in this hymn the men begin to echo the women’s spiritual devotion by the final stanzas. The men have now also become the pilgrims, singing hallelujahs to Christ the King, while the women respond with hosannas.<sup>139</sup>

This confidence in indigenous women’s dedication to Christianity had some similarities to the perspectives of early missionaries (see Introduction) as well as Eleazar Wheelock’s beliefs (see Chapter 2). For example, when Wheelock added the “Female School” onto his missionary training school, he did so because he was concerned about the prospect of the male students turning apostate. In a 1760 letter to a Boston donor, Wheelock wrote that the Indian missionaries he was training would need Christian wives to help them maintain standards of Anglo-American civilization while they were “on the business of their missions and out of the reach of the English.”<sup>140</sup> While Wheelock doubted the Indian men’s fidelity to their conversion once they are far “out of the reach of the English,” he apparently harbored no such fears about the women, whom he

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<sup>139</sup> Samson Occom, *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs; Intended for the Edification of Sincere Christians, of All Denominations* (New London, CT: Printed and sold by Timothy Green, a few rods west of the court-house, 1774), <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N10659.0001.001>.

<sup>140</sup> Eleazar Wheelock, letter to Andrew Oliver, 15 October 1760, quoted in Szasz, *Indian Education in the American Colonies*, 223.

assumed would remain steadfast in their commitment to Christian civilizing project.

Occom seemed to share Wheelock's confidence. While he acknowledged that some indigenous men had turned away from Christianity, his description of female sanctity via the hymns, coupled with his lack of criticism of women in his writings, indicate the trust that he placed in the Christian identity of indigenous women.

Nevertheless, while both white missionaries and indigenous Christian men portrayed indigenous women as adapting to Christianity more easily, Brothertown men accorded women a greater role as leaders and teachers of Christianity than white missionaries allowed. As shown in the Introduction of this dissertation, missionaries often emphasized that indigenous women submitted to their husbands in spiritual matters whenever possible, and avoided becoming the spiritual head of the household themselves. In contrast, Occom urged Mary "to pray with and for our poor children, and pray for your husband, and I will pray for you. Instruct our children in the fear of God."<sup>141</sup> Occom also had no objection to women leading prayer services, at least in certain circumstances. Occom corresponded with Phillis Wheatley, the acclaimed African-American poet, as well as her mistress. At one point, he suggested Wheatley could undertake the same type of missionary endeavor to people of her own race as Occom, Johnson, and Fowler imagined doing in upstate New York. "Pray Madam, what harm would it be to send Phillis to her native country as a female preacher to her kindred?" he asked. "You know Quaker women are allowed to preach, and why not others in an extraordinary case?"<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Mary Fowler Occom, 1767, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 81.

<sup>142</sup> Samson Occom, letter to Susannah Wheatley, 5 March 1771, in *Ibid*, 96.

As Chapter 6 will show, women in Brothertown did occasionally preach at church meetings, and regularly hosted services in their homes.

On the other hand, the new definitions of masculinity that emerged among Native Christian men in New England presented some challenges for indigenous women. During Samson Occom's long trip to the United Kingdom, Mary Fowler Occom sent their son Aaron to be educated at Moor's, writing that he needed a firm male authority figure in his life. "[I] would inform you that my son Aaron behaves himself so badly that I cannot keep him," she wrote. "...He is trying to get married to a very bad girl...and tries to run me in debt by forging orders."<sup>143</sup> Mary's complaints about Aaron echo some of the rhetoric surrounding masculinity used by her husband and others: for example, the idea that Aaron was trying to cheat his way into acquiring goods connects with the stereotypes of indigenous men as being shiftless and untrustworthy. Moreover, Mary described herself as feeling powerless in the face of her son's marriage choices, in contrast to traditional Algonquian practices where mothers and other important women in the community took primary control over marital matches.<sup>144</sup> Mary's letter indicates that she hoped that a man more firmly rooted in colonial power structures might be able to enact authority over her son in ways that she was no longer able to do.

Mary Fowler Occom's limited control over her children suggests one of the reasons why women might have wanted to move to Brothertown. While few women gave specific explanations of why they joined the community, a few existing documents give some clues. For example, Sarah Poquiantup (Niantic/Brothertown) sought to remove to

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<sup>143</sup> Mary Fowler Occom, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 8 November 1766, DCA, WP 766608.2.

<sup>144</sup> Robert S. Grumet, "Sunksquaws, Shamans, and Tradeswomen: Middle Atlantic Coastal Algonkian Women During the 17th and 18th Centuries," in *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives*, by Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock (New York: Praeger, 1980), 53.

Brothertown in 1799 with her children shortly after the death of her husband Isaac.<sup>145</sup> The Poquiantup family had both Niantic and Pequot branches and was closely connected to the Brothertown movement; the Niantic Hannah Poquiantup studied at Moor's in the 1760s, while Esther Poquiantup (Pequot/Brothertown) married Jacob Fowler. By moving to Brothertown after the death of her husband, Sarah may have been seeking to join with other extended family members. As Hannah Garrett (Narragansett/ Brothertown) wrote in a 1792 petition to the Connecticut General Assembly, she was aged and widowed, and her only child (Hannah Garrett Fowler, David Fowler's wife) had removed to Oneida – a child “which your Petitioner is desirous to see, but being poor cannot effect her journey unless [allowed to lease] her land and receive the profits in order to assist her in her journey.”<sup>146</sup> Both of these women owned land in coastal New England, but they seemed to be seeking out something different in Brothertown: the opportunity to be with their families and, perhaps, strengthen or re-establish some of their maternal authority in a place more distant from colonial pressures.

Poquiantup and Garrett were not the only women who made the move to Brothertown on their own. In fact, despite the visibility of the male leadership of the community, Brothertown was initially a slightly female-majority place. According to the first formal list of Brothertown residents, created in 1795, women made up more than half of the adult population, consisting of forty women and thirty-five men. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, this ratio was probably partly due to the demographic impact of the Revolutionary War, in which many indigenous men served and lost their lives.

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<sup>145</sup> Memorial of Sarah Poquiantup, 7 October 1799, CSA, Indian Papers, ser. 2, vol. 1, 99.

<sup>146</sup> Petition of Hannah Garrett, widow, 13 December 1792, Rhode Island Historical Society, Paul Campbell Research Notes, box 2, folder 12.

However, the 1795 census did list twelve women as the head of their households: seven widows and five single women, out of fifty households total.<sup>147</sup> Four of the widows had originally moved to Brothertown with their husbands, and the others were already widowed at the time of their arrival.<sup>148</sup> Poverty was also not the only motivating factor for widows to move: for example, Hannah Robins (Pequot/Brothertown), a widow, owned land in Farmington and had lived there independently for at least ten years before moving to Brothertown.<sup>149</sup> These cases underscore the notion that, rather than merely acquiescing to a husband's desire, women actively decided to join a Christian Indian community.

Overall, however, the foundation of Brothertown was conceptualized and defended as a place where Native men could fully enact masculinity without facing the pressures and limitations of colonial society. In their work, relationships with others, and governance, they hoped to navigate the world as equals to white men, instead of being subject to the paternalism and condescension that they faced in coastal New England. Women were not promised a similar transformation, but they perhaps had less need of such a radical re-definition of their roles. In Brothertown, women had the chance to continue to exert matriarchal authority within their families, although the influence of patriarchal models of marriage and Anglo-American domestic standards would continue to impact their daily lives. Chapter 6 will analyze women's lived experiences within Brothertown and similar Christian Indian communities.

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<sup>147</sup> Superintendents of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians, Assignment of Lots at Brothertown, September 15, 1795, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804, 8-11.

<sup>148</sup> See Appendix, "Family History of the Brothertown Indians," Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 335-67, and Superintendents of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians, Assignment of Lots at Brothertown, September 15, 1795, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804, 8-11.

<sup>149</sup> See Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 159, and Superintendents of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians, Assignment of Lots at Brothertown, September 15, 1795, HC-BR, 8-11.

## Part 2: Conclusion

The foundation of the Cacicas' Convent in 1782 and the foundation of Brothertown in 1785 both represented the culmination of years of indigenous groups organizing, campaigning, and gathering support for their project: a place where indigenous people would practice Christianity in a space that was exclusively indigenous. The parallel is the more noteworthy because in many ways, the process to establish these two spaces were dramatically different – a fact reflected not only in the actions of individuals, but also in types of historical records that were created. The movements also emerged in fairly different contexts in terms of geography, population density, and national identity. Nevertheless, in both cases conceptualizations of gender became an important rhetorical tool in the campaign to establish the new Christian Indian space. And in both cases, indigenous men hoped that the new foundation would help them demonstrate and be recognized as the equals of Euro-American men. Within these arguments, women (whose voices were only rarely recorded as a part of this process) became a *tabula rasa* for both the indigenous and Euro-American men who were contemplating the definitions of Christian Native femininity: bodies upon which new gender norms could be inscribed without any resistance.

In both coastal New England and Oaxaca, indigenous groups faced increasing pressure from colonialism during the eighteenth century, but in different ways. In Mexico, Bourbon policies began to chip away at longstanding privileges that had been afforded to the caciques in an effort to delegitimize indigenous authority. Moreover, especially in Oaxaca, the title of cacique became more widespread even as the power and influence of the caciques decreased, as cacique began to reflect economic status rather

than an inherited political position.<sup>1</sup> In coastal New England, a rise in immigration and fast-growing Anglo-American population demanded ever-larger proportions of indigenous land. Moreover, the presence of these colonists changed the ecology and landscape of New England even in places that colonists had not claimed as their own – making hunting, fishing, and other traditional Native ways of life more difficult.<sup>2</sup>

The different sources of these pressures, however, caused the indigenous groups to look in different directions for an answer. For the Oaxacan caciques, one response to the Spanish policies that threatened to erase them from the social hierarchy was to establish a new landmark for themselves in the heart of the Spanish colonial capital. Thus, the caciques' project involved the movement of people from the rural countryside into the urban city center. The Brothertown founders, in contrast, sought to move away from heavily settled regions back into something resembling a "wilderness." They hoped that this might allow them to prosper in a way that they believed was no longer possible for them in New England. Nevertheless, in the end both moves were motivated by the hope of escaping or lessening racial prejudice and demonstrating that indigenous people were equal to Europeans through a new physical presence in the landscape.

The caciques' efforts to establish an urban foundation, however, necessitated a completely different type of negotiation than the Brothertown founders' efforts to move west. The Cacicas' Convent had to gain the consent of the bishop of Oaxaca, the archbishop of Mexico City, the viceroy of Mexico, the king of Spain, and the pope -- as

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<sup>1</sup> Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2008); Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Macmillan, 1983); Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

well as gaining the approval of numerous other local religious figures, all of whom could have expressed contrary views that might have completely halted the project (and many did succeed in slowing it down). The record of the petition process, therefore, primarily consists of formal petitions and letters to these various authority figures, as well as official responses. There is little surviving information about the process of building consensus among the caciques to support the project in the first place, or about the identities of the women who entered the convent, or popular opinion more generally.

In contrast, the Brothertown founders were generally conversing with missionaries, donors, or the Oneida, as well as discussing the plan amongst the seven coastal New England tribes. Only one official's approval was really necessary, that of Indian agent Sir William Johnson, and we have no record of what happened in the meeting where the plan was first proposed to him. Other governmental sources, such as petitions from various tribes, indicate general land pressures on coastal New England people in general, but large groups of people never came forward to declare their reasons for moving to Brothertown to the government, at least not in a way similar to how the hundreds of caciques signed a document detailing their reasons for supporting the Cacicas' Convent. Instead, the written record reveals a great deal of Joseph Johnson and Samson Occom's perspectives on the Brothertown plan, and their efforts to create enthusiasm for the migration among their home communities and the other closely connected tribes.

In both cases, external political changes impacted the development of the project, but both the shifts and the impact were much deeper in New England. After the ascent of the Bourbon monarchy in Spain in 1700, the eighteenth century was a relatively stable

time in Mexico. While the general arc of the Bourbon Reforms and the changing social status of caciques provided the initial impetus to the project, there were no sudden changes in how the reform projects were implemented on a large scale, at least not to the extent that they would disrupt the plans for the Cacicas' Convent. Instead, the local political climate depended primarily on how the bishop interpreted Spanish and ecclesiastical policy, and his general viewpoint on indigenous populations, although the bishop's perspectives on these issues were never entirely free of influence from Bourbon decrees. The caciques approached each bishop only once to propose their plan, and after receiving a negative response, waited until the next bishop was appointed to try again. Nevertheless, throughout the entire process, the caciques could and did use European laws and declarations – such as papal bulls and royal decrees – in support of their petition, knowing that Mexican officials had to at least appear to conform to these prescriptions. Moreover, financial support from either European powers or European-backed authorities, like the king and the viceroy, proved helpful in demonstrating that the caciques had acquired sufficient funds for the convent.

The eighteenth century in North American history, however, was full of turmoil. In the early 1770s, Johnson and Occom found more support for their migration plan because Anglo-American colonists hoped the Brothertown community would create another barrier between the French and French-allied indigenous groups in Canada. With the outbreak of the American Revolution, American colonists' perspectives dramatically changed. They became both more suspicious of indigenous people who traveled in the backcountry, and therefore could be secretly aligning with the French, and more reliant on any male bodies to strengthen their military forces. This made indigenous peoples'

travel from coastal New England to upstate New York much more perilous, and delayed the implementation of the Brothertown plan. On the other hand, the consequences of the political break between the United States and Great Britain made the move away from New England more appealing for many indigenous people. For one, American independence also meant the loss of British charitable donations flowing across the Atlantic for American indigenous groups – something which, as historian Joanna Brooks pointed out, Occom was well aware would be a problem.<sup>3</sup> Given that many of the Brothertown founders had already become frustrated with Eleazar Wheelock, who had an immense influence on charities dedicated to serving indigenous people in New England, the loss of British support may have made them feel that they would be forced to choose between returning to Wheelock's circles or removing from the region altogether. Moreover, in general British policy and British agents had treated indigenous people better than local political leaders: the Mohegans and Narragansetts, for example, had sought redress of their problems with colonial officials in British courts. Without the moderating influence of Great Britain, many Brothertown founders believed there would be little stopping the Americans from swallowing up the entirety of indigenous land in New England.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Joanna Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Literature and Leadership in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 113n97.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, many indigenous people did remain in New England, and those communities have survived to this day, although not without struggle and difficulty. See Lisa Tanya Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Daniel R. Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780–1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Jean M O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Linford D. Fisher, *The Indian Great Awakening: Religion and the Shaping of Native Cultures in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially 181-183.

Despite the many differences in the campaign to establish Christian Indian spaces, gender was used in surprisingly similar ways by both the indigenous and Euro-American interlocutors. In both cases, women were assumed to have an easier time accepting Christian doctrine. As the men of Brothertown would have sung, using the hymnal compiled by Occom: "Tell us O Women, we would know/Whither so fast ye move?" The women would explain their dedication to Christianity by singing in response: "We, call'd to leave the World below,/Are seeking one above."<sup>5</sup> The women, through their devotion, serve as an example of Christian piety to the men around them. In Oaxaca, similar perspectives on female Christianity emerged. One of the supporters of the Cacicas' Convent, Fray Manuel Noriega, portrayed the women as examples of virtue ("lilies") developed among the sinful cultures of indigenous groups ("neophytes" who had a predilection to "idolatry"). "We can compare the proposal of the caciques," he concluded, "to the construction of a Garden in which to transplant those lilies."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the creole supporters of the convent as well as the caciques seemed to agree that indigenous women were particularly suited for Christianity.<sup>7</sup> In 1754, the caciques argued that indigenous women would effortlessly be able to attain the increased level of sanctity needed for entrance into the convent, since religious formation was "easy to impress on their docile natures."<sup>8</sup> Both the Brothertown men and the caciques, therefore, defined the very nature of indigenous women as highly compatible with Christianity.

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<sup>5</sup> Samson Occom, *A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs; Intended for the Edification of Sincere Christians, of All Denominations*. (New London, Conn: Printed and sold by Timothy Green, a few rods west of the court-house., 1774), Hymn XCIII: "A Sacred Dialogue," <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/N10659.0001.001>.

<sup>6</sup> Fray Manuel Noriega y Espina, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 May 1745, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 57r, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Fray Carlos de Almodovar, letter to the Oaxacan Cabildo, 25 April 1744, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 65v.

<sup>8</sup> Petition from don Juan Manuel de Velasco, 19 Feb 1754, NL, Ayer MS 1144.

The discourse surrounding the foundation of Brothertown and the Caciques' Convent also generally placed more weight on male emotions rather than female emotions. The Brothertown men portrayed themselves as experiencing deeper feelings than women could ever fully understand. "If you knew how you were beloved by me," Joseph Johnson wrote to his wife Tabitha, "you would wonder."<sup>9</sup> In contrast, in the initial years of the caciques' campaign, they described how indigenous women would feel honored at the opportunity to enter a convent. However, when Creole responses to the project were collected, only the two female respondents mentioned the feelings of the indigenous women; a male respondent focused instead on the caciques' own longing, rather than that of the cacicas. Perhaps in response to this emphasis, the caciques made fewer and fewer references to women's emotions surrounding the Cacicas' Convent in their petition documents as the years went on, focusing instead on the desires of the caciques or of indigenous people more broadly, instead of on women.

In both cases, Native men argued that the creation of this new space would allow them to achieve the fullness of Euro-American style masculinity. In Mexico, discussions of masculinity centered primarily on honor, a powerful and influential concept in the Spanish world.<sup>10</sup> Their efforts to have the convent be built along a principle road in the main city-center also demonstrate the importance of the convent as a demonstration of their own prestige and influence. The Brothertown founders, especially Joseph Johnson,

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Johnson, letter to Tabitha Occom, 5 November 1773, in Laura J Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 202.

<sup>10</sup> See Robert Schwaller, "'For Honor and Defence': Race and the Right to Bear Arms in Early Colonial Mexico," *Colonial Latin American Review* 21, no. 2 (August 2012): 239–66; and Mónica Díaz, "'Es Honor de Su Nación': Legal Rhetoric, Ethnic Alliances and the Opening of an Indigenous Convent in Colonial Oaxaca," *Colonial Latin American Review* 22, no. 2 (August 2013): 235–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10609164.2013.808470> for further analysis of indigenous men asserting their own status as honorable.

specifically identified Brothertown as a place where indigenous men could freely exercise their manhood. In fact, he began to define participation in the migration as a mark of manliness itself.

In all of these documents, indigenous women's voices are almost completely silenced. We know that indigenous women entered the Cacicas' Convent and moved to Brothertown, apparently of their own volition, yet we have little evidence as to what their views on gender might have been. Instead, gender roles are portrayed as almost a one-way street, where both Euro-American and indigenous men could project their own understandings of gender onto indigenous women. Nevertheless, participation in a Christian Indian community, once they were established, proved to be a decision that gave indigenous women greater access to authority and influence, at least within certain realms and in certain time periods. The story of women's experiences in Christian Indian communities – both the ways in which they enacted agency and leadership, and the limitations they faced – is the subject of the final portion of this dissertation.

### Part Three: Women's Lives in Christian Indian Communities

While male voices had dominated the campaigns for Christian Indian spaces, women flocked to them, becoming the majority of their communities.

By joining  
*the convents of Corpus Christi (1724),  
 Cosamaloapan (1737), the Cacicas' Convent (1782)  
 or La Enseñanza (1811)* *Brothertown (1785)  
 or Stockbridge (circa 1785)*

indigenous women intentionally placed themselves  
 at the intersection of Christian and Native identity.

Within these communities, they occupied leadership positions, such as  
*abbess* *schoolteacher*

and leveraged their reputations as “good Christian women”  
 to advocate for their tribes and extend their own agency.

For example, they used their influence to  
*help indigenous men find employment.* *acquire missionary support for tribal projects.*

Moreover, they worked to secure the financial stability of these communities  
*via creative fundraising strategies* *by earning “premiums” from the state.*

In the mid-nineteenth century, however,  
 the successfulness of these strategies began to diminish  
 under increasing national pressure on indigenous groups.  
 Newly emergent nation-states embraced a vision of democracy that centered  
 on white males, and attempted to eliminate indigenous land claims  
*by erasing the legal category of “indigenous.”* *through white settler expansion.*

While religion continued to shape national society, identifying as a  
 “Christian Indian” was no longer an effective tool against discrimination.

The legal status of the two primary case studies of this dissertation,  
*the Cacicas' Convent* and *Brothertown*  
 drastically changed in  
 1867 1837  
 when  
*the Cacicas' convent closed.* *the Brothertown became US citizens.*

Although their window of opportunity was limited to a few decades, the  
 accomplishments of women within Christian Indian communities  
 deserve closer attention. This is their story.

### **Chapter 5: “A Holy Indian Woman”: Indigenous Nuns in Mexico, 1782-1908**

The success of the caciques’ petitions (see Chapter 3) added a third convent for indigenous women to the existing two convents in Mexico: Corpus Christi in Mexico City and Cosamaloapan in Valladolid. Although the Cacicas’ Convent in Oaxaca always skated on the edge of financial insolvency, the convent remained true to its original purpose of only accepting indigenous women as nuns: evidence indicates, for example, that the nuns of the Cacicas’ Convent generally came from small, traditionally indigenous villages from around the Oaxaca region. The women of the Cacicas’ Convent, along with the nuns of Corpus Christi, Cosamaloapan, and the *colegialas* of the Guadalupe school, both acquired and actively maintained a reputation for holiness, held leadership positions, and developed relationships with viceroys, bishops, and other influential leaders in colonial New Spain. They then used this social capital to advocate for themselves, their convents, and their fellow indigenous people, both inside and beyond the convent walls. They secured donations, campaigned for more convents, and worked to secure employment or protection for indigenous men.

The emerging Mexican nation-state, however, worked to limit many of these avenues of influence after independence in 1820. Given the rapid changes in Mexican federal control – from conservative to liberal to French intervention and the imposition of a monarchy -- the relationship between the Catholic Church and the state, as well as official positions on the political category of indigenous, was frequently in flux as well. Nevertheless, the general trend was to diminish the role of corporatist landholding institutions, which impacted both religious orders and indigenous groups attempting to maintain traditional ways of life. The 1857 liberal constitution, particularly powerful after

the end of the French-backed Second Mexican Empire (1862-1867), caused the closure of convents across Mexico. Convents for indigenous were no exception: although many of the nuns attempted to maintain their enclosure and religious practices, and apparently continued to garner respect as religious women, their official presence in the city vanished and their numbers rapidly dwindled. Lacking a physical convent and forbidden from accepting new applicants into their communities, the experiment in indigenous convents died out with the last surviving nuns in the early twentieth century.

### **History of the Cacicas' Convent, 1782 - 1857**

After the Cacicas' Convent received royal approval in 1768, construction of the convent proceeded slowly over the next decade, stymied in part by the lengthy process of transferring certain promised funds from the Spanish monarchy's coffers to Oaxaca. In 1775, an architectural report sent to Spanish king Charles III stated that the entire first floor of the convent was completed, and that 10,000 to 12,000 pesos would be enough to cover the rest of the cost of construction. The same architect estimated the value of the Siete Príncipes church and its ornamentation, already completed, at 35,000 pesos, and the value of work already done on the convent at around 25,000 pesos.<sup>1</sup> It took another three years for the money to arrive in Oaxaca, at which point the convent's basic structure had been built; it only lacked the installation of "wooden doors and shutters."<sup>2</sup> (These finishing touches, however, may have taken more time than modern readers would assume. In a letter accompanying the donation of 2,000 pesos from the king, which had been transferred from Madrid to the viceregal court in Mexico City, the viceroy described

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<sup>1</sup> Report from the Diocese of Oaxaca to King Charles III, 21 August 1775, "Expediente de los Indios Nobles Caciques de la Ciudad de Antequera," AGI, México 2661.

<sup>2</sup> Don Juan Sánchez Casahonda, letter to viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 7 April 1777, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 298r.

the convent as “almost completed” and then crossed out this phrase and replaced it with the words “quite far along.”<sup>3</sup>) By the summer of 1781, Bishop José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa noted that the construction was complete, and that the convent could open as soon as the nuns’ cells were furnished with beds, the infirmary supplied with medical goods, and the convent’s pantry stocked with food. He advised indigenous women hoping to enter the convent to start putting together their applications for admission.<sup>4</sup>

In late January 1782, Madre María Teodora de Salazar, accompanied by five other women, set out from the convent of Corpus Christi in Mexico City to journey to Oaxaca, where they would serve as the founding members of the Cacicas’ Convent. Their travels would take them across the “vast archdiocese of Mexico City, as well as the diocese of Puebla de los Ángeles,” and involve the transfer of their supervision from the Franciscan order in Mexico City to the bishop of Oaxaca.<sup>5</sup> They were protected and accompanied on their journey by several priests, who were given permission to celebrate Mass and hear the nuns’ confessions in each of the three dioceses (normally, a priest’s license for these sacraments was limited to one jurisdiction).<sup>6</sup> Given the dates of Madre Teodora’s letters to the viceroy – one informing him of their pending departure and one of their arrival – the nearly 300-mile journey took a little over a month.<sup>7</sup> Although the convent was blessed

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<sup>3</sup> Antonio María de Bucareli y Usúa, letter to bishop José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, 17 September 1777, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 6409/11488/12/Expediente 012, 14r.

<sup>4</sup> José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, circular letter, 21 July 1781, Biblioteca Juan de Córdova [hereafter BJdC], Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzman, Cordilleras, Tomo 1.

<sup>5</sup> Juan de Miranda, letter to the Spanish court, 26 July 1773, AGI, Mexico 2661.

<sup>6</sup> Decree of Pius VI, 10 October 1776, AGI, Mexico 2661.

<sup>7</sup> Madre María Teodora de San Agustín, letter to viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 18 January 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 163; Madre María Teodora de San Agustín, letter to viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 26 February 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 165.

on February 10, the nuns did not arrive to take possession of the convent until February 24.<sup>8</sup>

The identity of the nuns who accompanied Madre Teodora is somewhat unclear. Multiple sources identify the five nuns as María Clara de Santa Gertrudis, María Mariana de la Luz, María Petra del Santísimo Sacramento, María Francisca Liberata de San Pedro de Alcántara, and Maria Gertrudis de los Dolores.<sup>9</sup> Not all of those names, however, appear in the list of nuns at Corpus Christi compiled by historian Josefina Muriel. Madre Teodora clearly does appear, as a woman from Cuauhtitlán, daughter of caciques Tomás Salazar and María de la Encarnación, who entered the convent in 1754.<sup>10</sup> María Mariana de la Luz entered Corpus Christi in 1764, from Santiago Cuauhtlalpa, and María Francisca Liberata entered in 1773 from Acatepec. María Clara de Santa Gertrudis was probably the same woman who entered Corpus Christ in 1761 as Maria Clara Tomasa de Santa Gertrudis, from Santiago Tlatelolco.<sup>11</sup> Most intriguingly, María Petra del Santísimo Sacramento was almost certainly the same woman as the nun listed in the Corpus as Petra Josefa del Sacramento, from the town of Santo Tomás Ixtlán in Oaxaca. If so, her father, Pedro Ramírez, had signed the 1766 petition for the convent in Oaxaca, seven years

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<sup>8</sup> José Antonio Gay, *Historia de Oaxaca* (Oaxaca: Impresa del Comercio, 1881), 566.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Gregorio Alonso de Origosa, "Tabla de Nombremiento de oficios de la Comunidad de Religiosas Capuchinas del Convento de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles," 25 November 1788, personal collection of Asunción Lavrin. Lavrin found this document in the holdings of the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City, but it no longer appears in their catalog and archivists were unable to locate it; I am grateful to Lavrin for loaning me her copy. See also Gay, 556; Manuel Martínez Gracida, *Historia de La Fundación de Oaxaca*, vol. 2 (Oaxaca: Biblioteca de la Casa de Cultura, 1894), 13; Luis Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* (Oaxaca: Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1993), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Josefina Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001), 58. While I generally relied on Muriel's excellent archival scholarship regarding the Corpus Christi convent, I did examine myself the entrance documents for Teodora Salazar, which can be found at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia – Archivo Histórico, Fondo Franciscano, Vol. 108, 118r.

<sup>11</sup> Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 59, 60.

before Petra Josefa entered Corpus Christi in 1773.<sup>12</sup> The identity of María Gertrudis de los Dolores, however, remains a mystery. The only nun of that name at Corpus Christi had joined the convent in 1731 and served as abbess there at least twice, including in 1782, after the Oaxaca delegation had already left.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the María Gertrudis who traveled to Oaxaca had taken her religious name in honor of that abbess.

Since women were required to be at least sixteen years old before receiving the habit at Corpus Christi – and, indeed, in any convent, according to the council of Trent – we can estimate that the five nuns were between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five when they arrived in Oaxaca.<sup>14</sup> Three of them were from indigenous villages on the outskirts of Mexico City, unsurprising given that nearly 75% of the nuns admitted to Corpus Christi came from the diocese of Mexico City.<sup>15</sup> A fourth came from a village in between Mexico City and Puebla. As mentioned previously, Sor Petra Josefa del Sacramento was probably chosen specifically for the Oaxaca foundation because her father had participated in the petition process for the convent.<sup>16</sup> In fact, two other Corpus Christi nuns from Oaxaca, Sor María Teresa de San Juan Nepomuceno and Sor Aniceta Velasco, were not selected for the foundation of the new convent, probably because their families had *not* supported the convent petitions. Residents of Sor María Teresa's hometown, San Miguel Amatlán, had signed the 1753 and 1766 petitions, but her father's

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<sup>12</sup> Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 60, and Petition of the caciques, 3 August 1766, AGI, Mexico, 2661, segundo cuaderno, 4r.

<sup>13</sup> Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 55, see also Sor Maria Gertrudis de los Dolores, letter to Viceroy Martín de Mayorga Ferrer, 14 November 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, in which Sor Gertrudis identifies herself as the abbess of Corpus Christi.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Miriam Gallagher, R. S. M., "The Indian Nuns of Mexico City's Monasterio of Corpus Christi, 1724-1821," in *Latin American Women: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 168n21.

<sup>15</sup> Gallagher, 157.

<sup>16</sup> Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 60; Petition of the caciques, 3 August 1766, AGI, Mexico 2661, segundo cuaderno, 4v.

name did not appear among the signatories. Although relatives of Sor Anicenta Velasco had helped originate the convent petition process, by the 1770s they opposed the project due to the increasing involvement of Spaniards and Creoles – and in fact, Sor Anicenta had entered Corpus Christi in 1781, clearly choosing to enter Corpus Christi rather than waiting a few more months for the Cacicas' Convent to open.<sup>17</sup>

The Cacicas' Convent apparently filled quickly with indigenous nuns. In 1788, Bishop Ortigosa paid the convent an official visit, and noted that there were eighteen nuns and six novices living in the convent, for a total of twenty-four women religious. Six years after the convent opened, Bishop Ortigosa was ready to appoint nuns other than the six founders to positions of authority, such as secretary, supervisor of the locutory (where nuns would meet with visitors), and instructress of the novices. While the six founders remained in the most important positions – abbesses and vice-abbess, among others – new names, like Sor María Isabel and Sor María Felipe, appeared in Ortigosa's list.<sup>18</sup> A census of Oaxaca, taken in 1792, stated that twenty-six nuns lived at the convent, along with two priests, two male servants, and four female servants.<sup>19</sup> In 1797, Madre Teodora reported that convent had filled to capacity as soon as it opened, and that in the

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<sup>17</sup> Muriel, *Las Indias Caciques de Corpus Christi*, 55-65. Names of petition signers and villages represented compiled from: Transfer of Poder, 23 October 1742, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 30-38r; don Juan Manuel Velasco y Aguilar and don Joseph Lopez de Chávez, letter to Oaxacan cabildo, 13 May 1743, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 44-47; Petition of the caciques, 6 September 1753, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 137-143r; Petition of the caciques, 3 August 1766, AGI, Mexico 2661, segundo cuaderno, 1- 8r. There may have been a fourth woman from Oaxaca living at Corpus Christi, Sor Juliana María, but she had entered Corpus Christi in 1751 and may have died before the Cacicas' Convent opened. Either way, her home village and family were not involved with the petitions for the Cacicas' Convent.

<sup>18</sup> Bishop Gregorio Alonso de Origosa, "Tabla de Nombremiento de oficios de la Comunidad de Religiosas Capuchinas del Convento de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles," 25 November 1788, personal collection of Asunción Lavrin.

<sup>19</sup> "Estado que manifiesta las personas de ambos sexos que existian en los Conventos..." 31 August 1792, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Padrones/3691/Volumen 13, 291.

fifteen years since the convent had opened, no other vacancies had appeared.<sup>20</sup> According to historian Luis Castañeda Gúzman, the convent remained fairly large well into the nineteenth century: thirty nuns lived at the Cacicas' Convent, a substantial percentage of the 143 nuns total living in five convents across the Antequera.<sup>21</sup>

An intriguing incident from the first decade of the convent's existence, however, suggests that racial identity within the convent was not as clear-cut as official statements made it appear. In 1788, Bishop Ortigosa paid the convent a pastoral visit. As was typical, he then sent the nuns a list of recommendations and policies for the spiritual improvement of the convent. One of the problems he identified was that some nuns were using racial epithets to describe their fellow nuns: specifically, terms like *mulata* and *zamba*, both words that indicated African heritage. The bishop warned them to avoid using descriptions that would "depreciate the *calidades* [of other nuns], whether in their person, or in their blood and descendance, for this not only shows a lack of charity, but is the origin of a thousand irritations." Once again, a colonial authority figure turned to paperwork as a demonstration of a person's ethnicity. "You all ought to understand that rigorous investigations of each of you are conducted by my office before you take the habit...and you are all of the same *calidad*."<sup>22</sup>

If the Oaxaca convent was inhabited entirely by indigenous women, what could have provoked the conflict? One possibility is that the founding nuns, sent from Mexico City, were prejudiced against the women from Oaxaca, who tended to have a darker

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<sup>20</sup> Sor María Teodora de San Agustín, letter to the viceregal court, 7 April 1797, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Bishop Gregorio Alonso de Origosa, "Avisos y ordananzas del Arzobispo Ortigosa," 5 November 1788, personal collection of Asunción Lavrin.

complexion than people from central Mexico. It is also possible that the use of racial terms reflected conflicts within the many indigenous ethnicities of Oaxaca. Or, perhaps some of the women actually did have African ancestry. The caciques who had spearheaded the campaign to establish the convent generally came from the “newer” class of caciques, who claimed their authority based on wealth and political status rather than ancestral heritage.<sup>23</sup> Members of this class might well have intermarried with Afro-descendants at some point, incorporating them into longstanding indigenous lineages. The nuns’ insults, then, suggests a possible discrepancy between official records of racial categories and popular perceptions. In order to enter the convent, women would have had to demonstrate their pure indigenous status to the satisfaction of the bishop, but this paper record might not have been convincing to other indigenous women who grew up with the collective memory of the Afro-Mexican origins of certain families. Whatever the case, the bishop’s 1788 report was the only time that racial or ethnic conflict was mentioned in conjunction with the Cacicas’ Convent.

Unfortunately, the historical record does not give much further evidence about whether or not the Cacicas’ Convent was actually inhabited exclusively by cacicas. Many of the convent’s records have been lost or destroyed, and to date archivists, collectors,

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the social dynamics among caciques in Oaxaca, see: John K. Chance, “The Urban Indian in Colonial Oaxaca,” *American Ethnologist* 3, no. 4 (November 1976): 603–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/643341>; Peter Guardino, “‘Me Ha Cabido En La Fatalidad’: Gobierno Indígena y Gobierno Republicano En Los Pueblos Indígenas: Oaxaca, 1750–1850,” *Desacatos*, no. 5 (2000): 119–30; Karen Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens: Local Liberalism in Early National Oaxaca and Yucatán* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750–1850* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Yanna Yannakakis, *The Art of Being In-between: Native Intermediaries, Indian Identity, and Local Rule in Colonial Oaxaca* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2008). For the specific background of caciques involved in the convent petition, see Mónica Díaz, “‘Es Honor de Su Nación’: Legal Rhetoric, Ethnic Alliances and the Opening of an Indigenous Convent in Colonial Oaxaca,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 22, no. 2 (August 2013): 235–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10609164.2013.808470>.

and historians have been unable to find a register similar to Corpus Christi's book of admittance. Some clues to the identity of the convent's residents, however, do exist. In 1781, Bishop Ortigosa sent a letter to all the parishes in the diocese of Oaxaca, exhorting indigenous women to begin preparing their applications for the convent so that all the paperwork could be completed by the time the convent opened. Specifically, he reminded the indigenous communities that the applicants had to be "healthy in mind and body" and with the "reputation of being ladies [*doncellas*]." They had to present their baptismal record, certified by a priest, and be prepared to answer questions about their genealogical background. He also asked that the women indicate if they were able to read and write, although it is unclear if this was a condition of acceptance into the convent, or just useful information to know.<sup>24</sup> (Women in the administrative ranks of the convent would have needed these skills; it might not have been as necessary for lesser nuns.)

Although Ortigosa's 1781 letter did not state that the women accepted had to belong to the noble classes, a 1797 report from Madre Teodora stated that all of the women in the convent were members of the political elite. "Cacicas and principal women have been admitted [into this convent]," she wrote. "According to our constitution, women who are not so noble but are still honest and educated Indian women may be accepted, but in this convent there have not been any of those, because at the time when novices were received, only the best of the applicants were selected."<sup>25</sup> The shifting social and political landscape of eighteenth-century Oaxaca may have made the category of cacique less important (and not as well-defined) by the 1790s as it was in the 1740s

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<sup>24</sup> José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, circular letter, 21 July 1781, BJDc, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzman, Cordilleras, Tomo 1.

<sup>25</sup> Sor María Teodora de San Agustín, letter to viceregal court, 7 April 1797, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 36.

when the caciques first proposed the convent, but it seems clear that the Cacicas' Convent prioritized the acceptance of women from families of good reputation and political influence.

Nineteenth-century documentation of the convent's inhabitants indicate that the geographic origin of the nuns in the Cacicas' convent generally corresponded with the breadth of villages and ethnicities represented in the petitions. Four wills written by nuns upon their entrance to the convent, each one dated in 1824, mention that the women came from Antequera, Tlalixtec, Taviche, and Teposcolula.<sup>26</sup> A later, undated list of nuns from the Cacicas' Convent, compiled sometime after 1867, lists seventeen names of nuns together with their parents' names and villages of origin.<sup>27</sup> Taken altogether, these documents indicate that in the nineteenth century, about two-thirds of the nuns came from traditionally Zapotec regions, while about twenty percent came from Mixtec regions and five percent from Nahua neighborhoods of villages. These number are similar to the percentages of cacique participation in the original petitions (see Chapter 3).

Without further information about the nuns' backgrounds, it is difficult to determine their socioeconomic status, but one piece of evidence does suggest that in the nineteenth century, the women continued to come from the same sort of middling indigenous nobility that had been represented in the 1767 petition (see Chapter 3). In 1829, a woman named Laureana Josefa de Lazaro y Díaz entered the convent, taking the

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<sup>26</sup> Testimonio de Laureana Josefa de Lazaro y Díaz, 28 October 1824, AHNO, Francisco Mariscal, Libro 292, 134r-139r; Testimonio de Josefa Antonia Ramos, 28 October 1824, AHNO, Francisco Mariscal, Libro 292, 140r; Testimonio Maria de los Dolores Vargas, 29 October 1824, AHNO, Francisco Mariscal, Libro 292, 140r-141r; Testimonio of Maria Luisa Garcia, 31 October 1824, AHNO, Francisco Mariscal, Libro 292, 142r-143r.

<sup>27</sup> "Las que vivan..." undated [circa 1867], AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/573. It should be noted that as of September 2017, the AHAAO's collection of nineteenth-century materials was generally uncatalogued and divided simply into boxes labeled "correspondence," "religious," etc. The AHAAO is striving to better organize this material, and future researchers may encounter a different organizational system.

religious name Sor María Catarina de Apolonia de Santa Clara. Three years later, her father, Manuel Lazaro, sold a small piece of land in their hometown of San Miguel Tlalixtac, a Zapotec village about six miles west of Oaxaca's capital. According to the papers filed by Lazaro, the land had originally been owned by his wife, María Diaz, who had recently died. She had bequeathed the land to her daughter Sor María Catarina, but because Sor María Catarina had renounced all worldly possessions upon entering the convent, the land reverted to Lazaro's ownership. The piece of land was quite small, and only worth 155 pesos. This indicates, first of all, that the family landholdings were not terribly vast. Secondly, it demonstrates that although Lazaro was an independent landowner (the tract for sale is bounded in part by Lazaro's other properties), his economic situation was marginal enough that 155 pesos was sufficient inducement to sell land. In short, Lazaro seems to have been an indigenous man with a certain amount of political clout and knowledge, with a moderate level of income for his time. His pride in his daughters' decision to join a convent is clear from the way that he named the convent in the land sale document: he called it the "Convent of the Poor Cacicas." As will be shown later, references to the indigenous origins of the Cacicas' Convent declined over the nineteenth century, so Lazaro's title indicates that he wanted to emphasize the indigenous nature of the convent – perhaps feeling the same sense of ethnic pride as the caciques from San Miguel Talisteca anticipated when they signed the 1753 convent petition.<sup>28</sup>

On the whole, evidence indicates that indigenous women flocked to the Cacicas' convent as soon as it opened, and continued to petition for entrance into the convent

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<sup>28</sup> Testimonio de Laureana Josefa de Lazaro y Díaz, 28 October 1824, AHNO, Francisco Mariscal, Libro 292, 134r; Sale of Land by Miguel Lazaro, 27 August 1832, AHNO, Vincente Castillejos, Libro 184, 127.

throughout the nineteenth century. In contrast, indigenous male support for the project waned even before the convent opened. As the cacique Juan Manuel de Velasco had worried (see Chapter Three), involving non-indigenous men in the convent petition process in the 1760s seems to have shifted the convent away from being a purely indigenous effort. By the 1770s, Spanish and creole men in Oaxaca were taking credit for the project. Don Juan Sanchez Casahonda, a creole politician who had taken over leadership of the convent construction in the 1770s, wrote to the viceroy that the anticipated competition of the convent was due to the “activity and zeal of the illustrious prelates of this diocese,” giving priests and the local bishop particular credit for finding the church of the Siete Príncipes after the Preciosísima Sangre location had been rejected (see Chapter Three).<sup>29</sup>

Bishop Ortigosa, in his 1781 letter to the parishes of Oaxaca, scolded indigenous groups for not fulfilling their promises of financial contributions; he claimed that if “His Majesty and various Spanish residents [creoles] had not contributed with numerous alms,” the convent would not even be close to ready to receive the nuns.<sup>30</sup> At one point, the expected rate of contributions to the convent seemed to be on track: in 1775, the convent needed about 10,000 pesos to complete, which was supposed to be covered by a 2,000 peso donation from the king, and a donation from the caciques for the rest – which the *apoderados* of the caciques had promised they would be able to collect “through donations and alms...using other resources if necessary.”<sup>31</sup> Bishop Ortigosa, on the other

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<sup>29</sup> Don Juan Sánchez Casahonda, letter to viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 7 April 1777, NL, Ayer MS 1144, 298-298r.

<sup>30</sup> José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, circular letter, 21 July 1781, BIdC, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzman, Cordilleras, Tomo 1.

<sup>31</sup> Report of the Oaxacan church cabildo, 20 February 1775, AGI, Mexico 2661.

hand, seemed to think that the caciques' efforts were lacking. Forty years later, despite evidence that indigenous women had maintained a fairly steady demand to enter the convent, bishop Manuel Isidoro Pérez worried that the caciques were not giving enough donations. Both Capuchin convents in the city (the Cacicas' Convent and another one that had been built in the 1730s for creole and Spanish women) were struggling for lack of funds, he wrote, but he especially wanted to remind "all the villages of this province" of their "grave obligation" with which they had promised to contribute "with respect to the Cacicas."<sup>32</sup> Women apparently continued to be sent from indigenous communities to join the convent, but financial support from those same villages appears to have been lacking.

In fact, the difficulties of gathering funds may have meant that the convent was not entirely completed by the time that the first nuns arrived in 1782. Within three months of her arrival, Madre Teodora was writing a letter to the viceroy, telling him that the convent complex was in desperate need of funding due to the "indecentcy of this church and the poverty of its sacristy." The viceroy responded positively to the request, apparently quelling financial concerns for the next decade or so.<sup>33</sup> Bishop Ortigosa, however, continued to worry. In 1790, he wrote that the plumbing that brought water to the convent was "so poorly constructed" that it should be entirely replaced.<sup>34</sup> A few years later, after a health scare, he updated his will to include a donation of six thousand pesos specifically for renovations of the Cacicas' Convent. As he explained, the money had to be used to update the convent buildings for the benefit of "the religious of the Indian

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<sup>32</sup> Manuel Isidoro, circular letter, 19 December 1820, in Luis Castañeda Guzmán and Manuel Esparza, eds., *Cordilleras Eclesiásticas de Oaxaca, 1820-1880* (Oaxaca: INAH - Centro Regional de Oaxaca, 2002), 33.

<sup>33</sup> Madre María Teodora de San Agustín, letter to Martín de Mayorga, 16 April 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 174.

<sup>34</sup> Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 27.

Capuchin Convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, who are suffering a thousand discomforts due to the poor disposition and distribution of the rooms.”<sup>35</sup> A little less than twenty years later, the Oaxacan cabildo, writing in the middle of a four-year gap between bishops, asked the priests of the diocese to encourage their parishioners to donate to the convent, blaming the convent’s financial troubles on the fact that the diocese lacked a bishop who could have advocated personally for better funding for the convent.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, the convent remained financially afloat for the next several decades, including through the tumultuous Mexican war for independence from Spain (1810-1819). As was typical for official Catholic institutions, the Cacicas’ Convent seems to have sided with the Royalists during the war. Or, at the very least, the man who was serving as their financial director, don José Mariano Mantecón, generally supported the Royalist cause.<sup>37</sup> At one point during the war, independence forces entered the city of Antequera, a Royalist stronghold, and began to plunder the city looking for Spanish valuables. The treasurer of the Cathedral transferred several valuable objects to the Cacicas’ Convent. Although the rebel forces arrived at the doors of the convent, “disturbing the silence and afflicting the innocent hearts of its religious inhabitants,” Mantecón apparently stood at the gates and prevented the rebels from entering.<sup>38</sup>

In the aftermath of independence in 1819, recognition of the Cacicas’ Convent as an indigenous institution fluctuated for the first half of the nineteenth century. Nationally,

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<sup>35</sup> Will of José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, 24 July 1794, AHNO, Joseph Alvarez, Libro 74, 88-91.

<sup>36</sup> Oaxacan church cabildo, circular letter, undated [presumably spring/summer 1800; the letter appears between two other entries dated March 1800 and August 1800], BJdC, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzman, Cordilleras, Tomo 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ana Carolina Ibarra, *El Cabildo Catedral de Antequera, Oaxaca y el movimiento insurgente* (Zamora, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán, 2000), 120–28, 186, 285.

<sup>38</sup> Testimonio del Jose Maria de Gris, 5 May 1817, in “Testimonio del Expediente que contiene la informacion con testigos designados de oficio a pedimiento del Señor Tesorero...”, BJdC, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán, Civil, Transcripciones, Caja 53, 81.

Mexican politics tended to de-emphasize ethnic differences and attempted to subsume them into political categories: *indios* often became known as *campesinos*, rural farmers.<sup>39</sup> As historian Deborah Kanter has pointed out, the purported inclusivity of Mexican national identity belies the fact that politicians “continued to view indigenous Mexicans as different and inferior.” The Mexican government re-organized self-governing indigenous communities, known as *repúblicas*, into municipalities, eliminating certain legal categories of resistance and advocacy that had historically been available to Native people under colonial rule.<sup>40</sup> Most relevant to the Cacicas’ Convent, the political category of cacique disappeared quickly in the 1820s. Peter Guardino has found that while Native people in Oaxaca frequently made legal claims to cacique status in the period 1750-1820, these claims disappeared after 1820.<sup>41</sup> As he argues, the advent of the Mexican Constitution of 1825, which mandated universal male suffrage and prohibited “hereditary distinctions, authority, or power,” meant that the legal system would have been extremely unfriendly to claims of special privileges due to cacique status.

This shift in political structure was matched by changing language regarding the Cacicas’ Convent. In the early decades of the convent, both indigenous and non-indigenous writers frequently referred to the convent as the Cacicas’ convent, or to the nuns as the Indian Capuchins, partly to distinguish the convent from another Capuchin convent in Antequera, which had been built in the 1730s for Spanish and creole women.

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<sup>39</sup> Francie R. Chassen-López, *From Liberal to Revolutionary Oaxaca: The View from the South. Mexico, 1867-1911*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>40</sup> Rodolfo Pastor, *Campesinos y Reformas: La Mixteca, 1700-1856* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987), 420–28; Robert H. Jackson, ed., *Liberals, the Church, and Indian Peasants: Corporate Lands and the Challenge of Reform in Nineteenth-Century Spanish America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); Peter Guardino, “‘Me Ha Cabido En La Fatalidad’: Gobierno Indígena y Gobierno Republicano En Los Pueblos Indígenas”; Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*; Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens*.

<sup>41</sup> Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*, 230–35.

For example, Bishop Ortigosa described the convent in his 1794 will as the convent of “Indian Capuchin Nuns of Santa María de los Ángeles,” and the 1817 Royalist report on the fighting in Oaxaca called it “the convent of Indian Capuchins.”<sup>42</sup> After 1820, however, official documents and newspapers only used the official title of the convent, never the colloquial “Cacicas’ convent” or making any reference to Indian nuns. Circular letters from various Oaxacan bishops in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s simply mentioned both Capuchin convents – the one originally for Spaniards and creoles and the Cacicas’ Convent – as “the two Capuchin convents” without distinguishing between them.<sup>43</sup> By the 1860s, newspapers commonly referred to the convent as the “Convent of Los Príncipes,” referring primarily to the church attached to the convent, or the “Convent of Santa María de los Ángeles.”<sup>44</sup>

The relationship between the Mexican government and the Catholic church would fluctuate over the next several decades: some of the administrations that controlled Mexico after independence in 1819 were more accommodating of church interests than others. Nevertheless, except for occasional federal government gestures towards regularizing and modernizing religious orders – such as inquiries in 1822 and 1826 into the amount of donations received by religious orders, or an 1844 order that all male

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<sup>42</sup> Will of José Gregorio Alonso de Ortigosa, 24 July 1794, AHNO, Joseph Alvarez, Libro 74, 88-91; Will of Antonio Jose Obañez de Corvera, 5 May 1817, BJDc, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán, Civil, Transcripciones, Caja 53, “Testimonio del Expediente que contiene la informacion con testigos designados de oficio a pedimiento del Señor Tesorero...”, 9v.

<sup>43</sup> Manuel Isidoro Pérez, circular letter, 25 February 1829; José Mariano Irigoyen, circular letter, 29 November 1838; Antonio Mantecón, circular letter, 4 January 1845, all in Castañeda Guzmán and Esparza, *Cordilleras Eclesiásticas de Oaxaca, 1820-1880*, 59, 76, 119.

<sup>44</sup> For example, see *La Victoria*, 27 December 1867, Tomo VI, Num 89, p 1.

monasteries must establish a primary school – religious orders in Oaxaca generally carried on as usual until the advent of the liberal Mexican Constitution in 1857.<sup>45</sup>

### **Indigenous Nuns' Influence and Impact: Mexico, 1782-1857**

The nuns of the Cacicas' Convent in Oaxaca frequently joined with their fellow indigenous religious at the Convent of Corpus Christi in Mexico City and the Convent of Nuestra Señora de Cosamaloapan in Valladolid, as well as the *colegialas* of the Guadalupe school in Mexico City, to advocate for themselves and other Native people. By entering a convent, indigenous women gained more opportunities to hold leadership positions and become exemplars of Christian life within colonial and early national society. As nuns, indigenous women could direct daily life within their convents (although never completely free from male supervision) and have their virtues extolled in speech and print across the Spanish empire. They also worked to ensure the financial stability of the existing convents for Native women, both through strategic alliance-building with influential creoles, and through creative fundraising strategies. Additionally, they campaigned for more convents for indigenous women, including specific proposals for convents in Mexico City, Puebla, and Morales. While only one of these proposals was successful, in all three cases the nuns leveraged their racial identity, their Christian reputation, and gendered rhetorical strategies to create long-lasting campaigns for new convents that successfully got the attention of bishops, viceroys, and monarchs. The women's efforts, however, faced immediate opposition in one area: when

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<sup>45</sup> Reference to the 1822 and 1826 inquiries are contained in Manuel Isidoro Pérez, circular letter, 21 March 1826, and Fernández Marinas and Juan Nepomuceno, circular letter, 4 April 1826, both in Castañeda Guzmán and Esparza, *Cordilleras Eclesiásticas de Oaxaca, 1820-1880*, 56–57, 57–58. Oaxaca's copy of the federal order that all monasteries incorporate primary schools into their catechetical efforts can be found at "El Supremo Gobierno..." 15 March 1844, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/566. In Antequera, the monastery of San Augustin, run by Augustinian monks, complied with the order.

indigenous nuns sought to expand access to their convents to non-elite indigenous women, male authorities quickly and firmly intervened and put a halt to these proposals.

Indigenous nuns' influence also extended beyond their primary focus on convents. The indigenous nuns of Mexico then used this authority and reputation they had developed to advocate for friends or family members with Spanish political and religious officials. They often supported indigenous people by putting their names forward for government jobs, acquiring letters of recommendation for them, or helping them get debts canceled. In this arena, the nuns' position at the intersection of indigenous identity and Catholic religiosity proved crucial: their status as nuns gave them access to New Spain's political and religious elite, while their connections to indigenous communities helped them know and sympathize with Native peoples' needs.

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As was the case of the Guadalupe school (see Chapter 1), membership in a convent allowed certain women to hold leadership positions such as abbess (mother superior), vicaress (assistant to the abbess), and instructor of novices, among many others. These roles were generally held for periods of three years, and women often rotated in and out of various positions. Moreover, the convent communities themselves elected the abbesses and other similar roles, later informing the bishop or priestly supervisor of their convent of their choices. As Madre Dominga of the Corpus Christi convent wrote in a letter to viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, "Elections...were celebrated today with universal peace and order."<sup>46</sup> While certain male leaders technically had the power to confirm or reject the outcomes of the election, they

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<sup>46</sup> Madre Dominga, letter to viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 31 December 1772, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

generally abided by the will of the community. In a letter to Madre Teodora, viceroy Bucareli simply thanked her for “informing” him that she had been “elected by her community” as abbess.<sup>47</sup> A record of an election held at the Cacicas’ Convent in 1860 gives a glimpse of how this process worked. When the community of seventeen nuns first voted for abbess, five different women received votes. On a second ballot, the numbers shifted slightly, but five names remained. By the third ballot, only three names remained, as supporters of some of the lower vote-getters cast their votes instead for the leading names. On the fourth ballot, only two names were present, and Sor María Augustina was elected abbess with nine votes over Sor María Isabel’s eight.<sup>48</sup> The position of abbess brought with it a high level of responsibility and authority over the convent, as well as a certain amount of legitimacy and influence in social, political, and religious circles outside of the convent. In a country where women were not enfranchised in public elections until the twentieth century, the ability of the nuns to choose their own leader – as well as bestow upon one of their own the right to influence the upper echelons of Mexican society -- must have been empowering.

Joining a convent also made it more likely that any given Native woman’s holiness would be recognized and praised by the broader society, particularly in books and sermons. When Corpus Christi opened on September 10, 1724, Juan Ignacio Castorena y Ursúa, an influential priest, declared that the woman would be “Indians of great importance in this city.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, his sermon on the occasion of the convent’s

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<sup>47</sup> Antonio María Bucareli y Ursúa, letter to Madre Teodora, 31 January 1778, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>48</sup> Voting record, contained in don Nicolas Vasconcelos, letter to the nuns of the Convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, 28 July 1860, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

<sup>49</sup> Juan Ignacio de Castorena y Ursúa, *Las indias entendidas, por estar religiosamente sacramentadas, en el Convento, y templo de Corpus Christi de esta imperial corte de Mexico*. (Madrid, no publisher given, 1725), 5.

founding praised the intellectual and spiritual accomplishments of indigenous women, and indigenous peoples more broadly. The women preparing to enter the convent, he explained “have applied themselves to comprehend two languages, Spanish and Latin” and demonstrated that “among Indian women, there is a great deal of understanding, as well as finely-tuned consciences.” These character traits permitted the Native women to become “consecrated religious Indian women” who would “live as virgins in order to become angels.”<sup>50</sup> (On this last point, Castorena’s fervor transcended the boundaries of Catholic theology: church teaching holds that humans and angels are distinct types of beings, and that humans do not become angels even after death.) As was often the case for important sermons, Ursúa’s message was published in Madrid and read across the Spanish Empire, informing the world that indigenous women were not only suitable nuns, but also important examples for the surrounding society.

Similarly, don Joseph Victoriano Baños y Domínguez, a priest at the Cathedral of Oaxaca, gave a eulogy for Madre Teodora upon her death in 1799. The sermon was published, although in Mexico City and probably not as widely disseminated as Ursúa’s. In a discourse spanning 26 pages and divided into two sections, Baños waxed poetic about Madre Teodora’s virtues, comparing her to the biblical warrior, Judith; the prudent virgins of Jerusalem, and Colossus (in terms of her virtue). He described her as an “exemplary nun [and] an Abbess worthy of our praises,” and suggested that Madre Teodora had demonstrated to the rest of the world that “all souls are equal...there is no

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<sup>50</sup> Castorena y Ursúa, 4, 5. Castorena y Ursúa’s praise for these nuns did have its limits. He suspected that the women had learned to read the “syllables” of Latin in order to properly sing the Psalms and recite other prayers. As he argued, this meant that the nuns were “intelligent in the style of the prudent virgins of the Gospel,” and could “boast of having great understanding” but perhaps did not quite achieve the level of being *letrada* [a term which translates as simply “literate”, but was used in colonial Mexico more in the sense of a “man of letters,” someone who could wield rhetorical skills in law, philosophy, theology, etcetera].

difference between Asians and Africans, Europeans and Americans, whites and Blacks, blonds and brunets: before God, the greatest and holiest is the one who showed most charity, whoever they may be, be they Spanish, Indian, Mulatto, Mestizo, or any other caste.”<sup>51</sup> Notably, Baños also argued that Madre Teodora was “the first [person or woman] in her nation who, through her virtue, had made herself worthy of a eulogy.”<sup>52</sup> In Spanish, Baños identified Madre Teodora simply as “the first” [*la primera*]; since both person and woman are feminine nouns in Spanish, Baños statement does not indicate whether he saw Madre Teodora as the first woman or the first person to be worthy of such an honor. Throughout the eulogy, however, he certainly promoted Madre Teodora as an example to indigenous men and women as well as to the rest of the world. Her reputation and acclaim depended on her specific positionality as an indigenous women who was also devoutly religious.

Moreover, the Native nuns did not just passively accept their roles as content for creole priests’ sermons; rather, they actively participated in and promulgated these life stories as well. As the historian Kathleen Myers argues, Catholic women in Europe had long navigated gender norms regarding spirituality through what she calls the “mystic triad,” in which women asserted themselves as particularly close to divine revelation while garnering honor both for themselves and for their priestly biographers.<sup>53</sup> As nuns, indigenous women gained new access to this mystic triad. At Corpus Christi, the lives of several exemplary nuns were written down in the convent’s annals. Seven of these

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<sup>51</sup> “Elogio Funebre (1799)” reprinted in Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 94–95.

<sup>52</sup> “Elogio Funebre (1799)” Ibid., 94.

<sup>53</sup> Kathleen Ann Myers, *Neither Saints nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81.

biographies were compiled, most likely by a priest, into a single manuscript, but Mónica Díaz discovered that these stories were based upon texts written by the nuns themselves, called *Apuntes de algunas vidas de nuestras hermanas difuntas* [Notes on Some of Our Deceased Sisters]. The *Apuntes*, Díaz argues, use a more colloquial style, dive more deeply into stories of ethnic conflict between the Spanish and indigenous nuns, and defend the idea of the Corpus Christi convent as a place exclusively for indigenous women. While the male compiler of the manuscript version used more formal language and skipped over some of the references to the challenges faced by indigenous nuns, the *Apuntes* served as a starting point, and a clear indication that the nuns were interested in constructing their own textual self-representation.<sup>54</sup>

Another example of (likely) self-representation comes from the preface to Madre Teodora's eulogy, which was dedicated to the bishop and signed by the nuns of the Cacicas' Convent.<sup>55</sup> In the two-page preface, the women seem determined to present their *bona fides* as intellectuals, holy women, and indigenous women, using quotes from classical Latin, citing bible verses, and even incorporating a word of Nahautl. The preface is written primarily in Spanish, but nearly half the document is a quote in Latin of a poem in honor of emperor Manlius Theodorus by Roman poet Claudian; the nuns used the wordplay of a poem about a man named Theodorus to praise Teodora's virtues. The nuns also touted their biblical knowledge by referencing the blessing of Benjamin from the bishop (a reference to Deuteronomy 33:12), and including a quote (in Latin) of Sirach

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<sup>54</sup> Mónica Díaz, *Indigenous Writings from the Convent: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy in Colonial Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 93–109.

<sup>55</sup> "Elogio Funebre [10 May 1799]" in Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 77–96. The nuns' preface is on pages 78–79. There remains, of course, the possibility that the preface was not written by the nuns but merely attributed to them. Nevertheless, the entire preface is in the "voice" of the nuns, using terms like *nosotras* [we women] and describing Madre Teodora as "our abbess."

3:19: “My son, do thy works in meekness, and thou shalt be beloved above the glory of men.” They also acknowledged the paternal affection and protection of the bishop towards them as *Xocoyotl*, a Nahuatl word that meant youngest daughter. This term was often used as a name, and carried the connotation of a particularly beloved or special child – the type of word that might be commonly used in an indigenous family even if they used Spanish for most of their daily communication, as was often the case for elite indigenous people at this point in time.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, although Zapotec or Mixtec words might have reflected local Oaxacan cultures better, Nahuatl was the most commonly recognized indigenous language in colonial Mexican society. By placing a Nahuatl word alongside Roman poetry and biblical quotations, the Cacicas’ Convent nuns made a strong statement about their intellectual achievements and their position as both indigenous women and respected nuns.

The indigenous nuns of Mexico also used other forms of text to bolster their reputation and solidify their connections with important political figures. In particular, through frequent letters of greetings, small gifts, and affective-laden communications, indigenous women in Christian Indian communities actively constructed relationships with men like Martín de Mayorga and Juan Vicente de Güemes in order to secure their paternalistic protection. While convents across Mexico City often sent greetings to the viceroy, the indigenous abbesses in particular never missed an occasion to remind the viceroy of their filial respect and love for him. Sometimes, praise for the viceroy was immediately followed by a request for donations, as was the case in a letter sent by Corpus Christi abbess Madre María Teresa del Señor San José in 1771. After wishing

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<sup>56</sup> Thanks to my colleagues Tara Malanga and Peter Sorensen for help with the translation.

viceroy Antonio Maria de Bucareli y Ursúa a merry Christmas, which the convent hoped he would celebrate with a happiness that was as large as “the greatness of his character...and the size of our desires,” Madre María Teresa informed the viceroy that the entire convent had received communion in his honor. Then, “placed at the feet of your Excellency,” she requested any alms that the viceroy was able to give to the convent.<sup>57</sup> In a single letter, Madre María Teresa strove to both construct a relationship from the viceroy and ask for his help.

Generally, however, the women separated their affective-laden correspondence from their direct appeals, building up a bank of social capital for future withdrawals. Two major themes stand out in these letters: the concept of nuns as spiritual daughters of powerful colonial officials, and their position of supplication at the feet of these men. For example, María Petra Perez, the headmistress of the Guadalupe school, sent viceroy Bucareli a gift of a dozen fish for his birthday, along with the well-wishes of all the *colegialas* at the school, which as she reminded the viceroy, were his “devoted daughters.”<sup>58</sup> Madre María Gertrudis de los Dolores sent viceroy Martín de Mayorga feast-day greetings from herself on behalf of the entire convent of Corpus Christi, which she described as “your community and Your Excellency’s daughters.”<sup>59</sup> As mentioned above, in the eulogy for Madre Theodora, the Cacicas’ Convent nuns claimed both indigenous heritage and a special paternal relationship with colonial officials

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<sup>57</sup> Madre María Teresa del Señor San José, letter to viceroy Antonio Maria de Bucareli y Ursúa, 23 December 1771, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 2922/8001/36/Exp 036.

<sup>58</sup> María Petra Pérez, letter to viceroy Antonio Maria de Bucareli y Ursúa, 12 June 1774, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>59</sup> Madre María Gertrudis de los Dolores, letter to viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 10 November 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

simultaneously by describing themselves as *xocoyotl*, beloved youngest daughters.<sup>60</sup> As Stephanie L. Kirk points out, nuns across the Spanish-speaking world, not just indigenous nuns, used this same rhetoric when appealing to colonial officials for protection.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the indigenous nuns seem to have used this strategy more frequently, and incorporate claims to paternal treatment based both on their status as women as well as indigenous people.

The nuns' letters to viceroys and bishops also emphasized the women's humility and dependence on male protection, making sure that they were not seen as too assertive or challenging authority. One letter from the Corpus Christi nuns to the viceroy connected both themes of humility and filial devotion, opening with the statement that the nuns were "placed at the feet of Your Excellency" and closing with the signature, "Your humble daughters [*menores hijas*]." <sup>62</sup> In that same document, the nuns recognized that other religious institutions in Oaxaca preceded them both in age and honor, but still expressed hope that they could be blessed by the "delight, affection, and protection" of the bishop.<sup>63</sup> A phrase from one of Madre Teodora's letters to Viceroy Martín de Mayorga nicely summarizes the strategies of the indigenous nuns: "I take up my pen to place myself at emotionally at your feet (as a beloved and recognized daughter)." <sup>64</sup> Using

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<sup>60</sup> "Elogio Funebre (10 May 1799)" in Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 78.

<sup>61</sup> Stephanie Kirk, *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 109.

<sup>62</sup> Madre María Felipa de Jesús, letter to viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 1 June 1773, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>63</sup> Preface to "Elogio Funebre (1799)", republished in Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> Madre María Teodora, letter to viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 18 January 1782, AGN Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1. Madre Theodora's letter has some beautiful wordplay in Spanish: writing upon her departure from Mexico City, she says that she places herself at Mayorga's feet *en afecto* (through her affection) since she is unable to do so *en efecto* (literally: in effect, in this case meaning that she is physically unable to place herself at his feet).

the gendered rhetorical tools available to them, such as references to their unworthy status, the greatness of the viceroys' paternal protection, and their position as his daughters, the indigenous nuns created affective ties that helped connect their convents with most powerful men in Mexico.

Moreover, it is clear that this strategy worked. For example, Madre Teodora maintained a regular correspondence with various viceroys, especially Martín de Mayorga (1779-1783) and Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca (1794-1798), throughout her time as a nun in both Corpus Christi and the Cacicas' Convent. Over the span of just a few months, for example, she created a strong affective bond with viceroy Mayorga. In August of 1779, she wrote the newly-appointed Mayorga a letter welcoming him to the city, to which he responded with a one-sentence formulaic note.<sup>65</sup> Two months later, she sent him special greetings from Corpus Christi on the occasion of the feast of St. Martín, Mayorga's namesake. "We hope that Your Excellency experiences an increase of grace and health, and many consolations both spiritual and temporal," she wrote to him, adding that the community had dedicated their Mass that day to Mayorga. This spiritual gift was apparently quite meaningful to Mayorga, and prompted a longer response: "Nothing could have pleased me more," than receiving her prayers, he replied.<sup>66</sup> By Christmas, Madre Teodora's expressions of well-wishes had succeeded in gaining Mayorga's trust, and garnered his support for future convent endeavors. "Just as I know the sincerity of the expressions with which you greeted me in yesterday's letter...so may you be assured of

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<sup>65</sup> Madre María Teodora, letter to Viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 21 Aug 1779, and Martín de Mayorga, letter to Madre María Teodora, 29 Aug 1779, both in AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>66</sup> Madre María Teodora, letter to Viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 9 Nov 1779, and Martín de Mayorga, letter to Madre María Teodora, 10 November 1779, both in AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

my appreciation,” he wrote to her in 1779, “...and the pleasure with which I offer to serve you and your fellow nuns in whatever way I can.”<sup>67</sup> In just a few months, Madre Teodora, an indigenous woman from Mexico’s central valley, had succeeded in establishing a special bond with one of the most powerful Spaniards in Mexico. When she moved to Oaxaca, Madre Teodora took care to maintain the relationship that she had created. “Nothing could ever make me fail to send the proper respects to your Excellency,” she wrote to Mayorga, “nor deprive me of the awareness that myself and my companions are your most humble daughters.”<sup>68</sup> As Madre Teodora clearly realized, maintaining a close relationship with the viceroy, even across long distances, was crucial for the well-being of indigenous convents.

The relationships that the nuns had developed with various viceroys often led to a favorable reception of their specific requests. For example, in 1791, the abbess lamented the lack of decoration for the altar in their church and asked for financial support from the viceroy to help improve the situation. Within a week, viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes responded that he would “contribute with pleasure” to their project.<sup>69</sup> Madre Teodora used a similar strategy. In 1782, upon her arrival to the Cacicas’ Convent in Oaxaca, she discovered that the church attached to the convent was, in her opinion, not sufficiently ornate for the celebration of the Mass. As mentioned previously, she decided to rectify this situation by asking viceroy Mayorga for a donation, through a particular type of

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<sup>67</sup> Madre María Teodora, letter to viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 16 December 1779, and Martín de Mayorga, letter to Madre María Teodora, 17 December 1779, both in AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>68</sup> Madre María Teodora, letter to viceroy Martín de Mayorga, 26 February 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.mee

<sup>69</sup> Sor María Juana de San José, letter to viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, 4 January 1791, and Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, letter to Sor María Juana de San José, 9 January 1791, both in AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/2/Exp 2, 430-431.

spiritual fraternity: donors would pledge specific amounts of money that would pay for the Masses to be said on the occasion of a nun's death, and in return the entire convent would pray for its benefactors. Notably, Madre Teodora's letter was full of confidence that the viceroy would agree to this plan, based on his reputation for "generous charity." In fact, Madre Theodora essentially took responsibility for the Mayorga's decision, writing in the first person, "I will shortly bestow [the Viceroy's charity] to remedy the indecency of this church and the poverty of its sacristy."<sup>70</sup> Her confidence was well-placed, as Mayorga responded almost immediately, communicating his utmost support for Madre Teodora and her new convent and thanking her for allowing him to contribute financially to her project.<sup>71</sup>

Occasionally, the nuns branched out into more creative strategies for fundraising – ones that reinforced the nuns' reputations as indigenous women as well as holy women. For example, the nuns of Corpus Christi petitioned the pope in 1849 for a special indulgence to be granted to those who visited any Capuchin convent in Mexico. Although the nuns, who identified themselves as "Capuchin nuns of the Mexican Republic," described their motivation as simply being the "spiritual benefit" of the Mexican population, the proposal had a monetary benefit as well. Essentially, the plan was intended to increase visitors to the convent churches: the indulgence would apply to anyone who had a Mass celebrated in the church. The fee for the Mass, presumably, would go at least in part into the coffers of the convents. Pope Pius IX gave his permission quickly, and the archbishop of Mexico City informed the rest of the Mexican

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<sup>70</sup> Madre María Teodora de San Agustín, letter to Martín de Mayorga, 16 April 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 174.

<sup>71</sup> Martín de Mayorga, letter to Madre María Teodora de San Agustín, 24 April 1782, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 175.

bishops about the proposal. In Oaxaca, Bishop Antonio Mantecón y Ibáñez had a decision to make: along with the Cacicas' Convent, there was another Capuchin convent for Spanish and creole women in the city, but only one could be chosen as the site for the indulgence. Although the indulgence documents never mentioned the identity of Corpus Christi as a convent for indigenous women, Mantecón chose the Cacicas' Convent church, perhaps mindful of the implicit connection between Corpus Christi and the Cacicas' Convent. The actions of the Corpus Christi nuns, therefore, helped raise funds for their convent as well as others, and also subtly underlined the connections between the convents for indigenous women in Mexico. By using their knowledge of Catholic theology, as well as continuing the tradition of seeking the patronage of influential men, the nuns of Corpus Christi secured an increase in donations for themselves and the other indigenous nuns in Mexico.<sup>72</sup>

The nuns' activism, however, was not limited to gaining financial support for their existing convents: they also dedicated themselves to pursuing the construction of additional convents for indigenous women. In 1779, as the long-awaited Cacicas' Convent in Oaxaca was in the final stages of construction, a former abbess of Corpus Christi, Sor María Dominga de Santa Coleta, wrote directly to the king of Spain to ask for more convents.<sup>73</sup> "Prostrated at the feet of Your Majesty, I present to you the great necessity we have for two more of our convents...in order that many Indian cacica girls may achieve their vocation." She based her request in an emotional appeal, explaining

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<sup>72</sup> Petition of the Corpus Christi nuns, undated; Declaration of Pius IX, 13 June 1849; Antonio Mantecón y Ibáñez, letter to the abbess of the Convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, 24 October 1849; all in BJDc, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán, Sección Religiosa, Correspondencia, Caja 54.

<sup>73</sup> The term "former abbess" here simply refers to the fact that Sor María Dominga had served a term as abbess (probably for three years) and then returned to her regular roles in the convent, a common occurrence.

that she had to turn away many applicants to Corpus Christi for lack of space, and had been “moved by compassion and pity to see the great desires and anxieties [of these applicants], and their continual perseverance to wait until a single place became available.”<sup>74</sup>

Sor María Dominga’s argument, although based in affect, was also undergirded by practical concerns, at least in terms of the sites that she proposed. She specifically asked the king to give his royal permission to build a convent in two places: the school of San Francisco Xavier in Puebla, and the chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles in Tlatelolco, an indigenous neighborhood on the northern edge of Mexico City. Both institutions had been founded by religious orders (the Jesuits and Franciscans, respectively) but the school of San Francisco Xavier had been taken over by diocesan authorities after the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish territories in 1767, making it more available to new religious orders.<sup>75</sup> The monarchy had similarly moved to reduce Franciscan influence in the early 1770s, and had taken one church in Tlatelolco, Santa Ana, and placed it under diocesan control, while leaving the larger chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles under Franciscan administration. This arrangement, made in 1771, vexed diocesan officials, who tried to get the Franciscans assigned to Santa Ana and take over Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles themselves.<sup>76</sup> As a Franciscan herself (the Capuchins were a branch of the Franciscan order), Sor María Dominga might have been hoping to

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<sup>74</sup> Sor María Dominga de Santa Coleta, letter to King Carlos III, 21 May 1779, AGN Templos y Conventos, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3.

<sup>75</sup> See Report of the Fiscal de lo Civil, 17 April 1784, AGN, Templos y Conventos, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 102r.

<sup>76</sup> Xixián Hernández de Olarte, “Intento de Fundación de Un Convento Para Indígenas En Tlatelolco, Siglo XVIII,” *Boletín de Monumentos Históricos*, no. 30 (2014): 227.

ensure that Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles remained in Franciscan hands, while taking advantage of the Jesuit expulsion to expand Franciscan influence in Puebla.

Carlos III responded with interest to Sor María Dominga's proposal, but reminded the nuns that the standard procedure involved getting the support of local officials, and ordered the viceroy to open an official investigation into the possibilities of constructing the new convents.<sup>77</sup> This process, however, would not turn out well for the Corpus Christi nuns. Almost immediately, the bishop of Puebla, Victoriano López Gonzalo, responded to the viceroy expressing his opposition to the plan. His concerns were primarily financial: the city of Puebla already hosted eleven convents, eleven monasteries, as well as five homes for women in various stages of life, three hospitals, and multiple other charitable initiatives. While he was grateful that the donations of the diocese managed to cover the costs of all these organizations, he informed the viceroy that he doubted money could be stretched further to support another convent. His opposition was also partially rooted in his own understanding of indigenous peoples' spirituality. The school of San Francisco Xavier was currently being used, he explained, as a training center and home base for priestly missionaries, who then went out into the countryside to minister to indigenous settlements. According to bishop López, these missionaries had unique insights into indigenous character, which allowed them to be effective confessors and preachers. In contrast, bishop López believed, a convent for indigenous women would not be nearly as useful for the spiritual formation of his diocese.<sup>78</sup> In other words, bishop López believed that indigenous people (or at least the majority of them) were still

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<sup>77</sup> Declaration of Carlos III, 19 November 1779, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Caja 3491, Exp 65.

<sup>78</sup> Victoriano López Gonzalo, letter to viceregal court, 9 September 1780, AGN, Templos y Conventos, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 7-11.

neophytes in the faith, needing to have the Catholic faith mediated to them through specially-trained missionaries, rather than accepting that at least some indigenous women were as prepared as Spanish or creole women to become nuns.

The report on the Tlatelolco location was even worse. The bishop of Mexico City, Alonso Núñez de Haro y Peralta, rejected Sor María Dominga's emotional appeal for the need for more convents: as was the case with any religious institution, he explained, "some women will be disappointed that their desires [to enter the convent] have not been accommodated, but in these cases we must defer to prudence." According to the "just and rational consideration of the venerable Fathers of the Council of Trent (1545-1563)," he continued, convents could not exceed the financial limitations of their current donors in order to accept more women. In fact, he believed that the women hoping to secure a place in Corpus Christi should be reprimanded for their tears and ordered to comply with greater obedience to the decrees of Trent. (He did suggest that perhaps Corpus Christi could be expanded, if the demand for entrance was really that high.)<sup>79</sup> Although indigenous nuns across Mexico often wielded gendered, emotional language to great effect (as will be shown in greater detail later), Núñez de Haro's response highlights one of the pitfalls of this approach: women's arguments could be categorized as irrational or hysterical.

In the end, practical concerns provided sufficient justification to reject the convent proposal. Officially, the biggest problem with the proposal was that the neighborhood of Tlatelolco was located outside of the city walls of Mexico City. The Council of Trent had ordered that all convents must be built within the city limits, in order to ensure the

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<sup>79</sup> Alonso Núñez de Haro y Peralta, letter to viceregal court, 30 September 1790, *Templos y Conventos*, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 76-77.

protection of the women inside.<sup>80</sup> The two men also appeared hesitant to support a proposal that would keep Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles under Franciscan control, and were skeptical that enough donors could be found to financially secure the convent.<sup>81</sup> Despite support from local Franciscans, the proposal was essentially a non-starter. Once again, bureaucratic delays caused some confusion; the nuns of Corpus Christi wrote to viceroy Matías de Gálvez y Gallardo in 1784, saying that they had never heard the final outcome of the investigation, but this simply led to the king officially rejecting the petition in 1785.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, the nuns of Corpus Christi continued to petition for additional convents. Sor María Dominga, perhaps suffering from sickness or old age and aware that her remaining time on earth was short, pleaded again with the viceroy for a new convent in 1789. Her timing might also have been impacted by external events: the bishop of Puebla who had opposed the new convent had been reassigned to a new diocese in 1785, and his successor had died in 1788, leaving the diocese temporarily under the control of the diocesan cabildo – a circumstance that had proved favorable for the caciques of Oaxaca (see chapter 3). Carlos III had also recently passed away, leaving Carlos IV to assume the throne, while a new viceroy for New Spain had also arrived in 1787. In other

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<sup>80</sup> Report of the Fiscal of the Viceregal Court, 17 April 1784, *Templos y Conventos*, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 101r.

<sup>81</sup> Hernández de Olarte, “Intento de Fundación de Un Convento Para Indígenas En Tlatelolco, Siglo XVIII,” 227; see also Núñez de Haro y Peralta, Alonso, letter to viceregal court, 30 September 1780, AGN, *Templos y Conventos*, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 76-77, and Rivadeviera Muñoz y Sandoval, Antonio Venegas [pastor of the church of Santa Ana], letter to the viceregal court, 20 October 1780, *Templos y Conventos*, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 77-78.

<sup>82</sup> Sor María Dominga de Santa Coleta, letter to Matías de Gálvez y Gallardo, 22 October 1783, AGN, *Templos y Conventos*, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 75-75r; Decree of Carlos III, 11 November 1785, AGN, *Templos y Conventos*, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 113-116r.

words, only two players remained the same: the archbishop of Mexico City, and Sor María Dominga.

Perhaps in recognition of these changes and continuities, Sor María Dominga apparently gave up hope in the Tlatelolco location, under the authority as the same archbishop as before, but believed that the Puebla convent might still be a possibility. In handwriting that was noticeably shakier than her letters from earlier in the decade, she wrote to the viceroy, “The cause is God’s, and this encourages me to pursue this project, in order that he be loved by his creatures and save their souls.”<sup>83</sup> A week and a half later, before the viceroy had time to respond to her letter, she died, leaving Sor María Manuela del Corazon de Jesús in charge of both the convent of Corpus Christi and the effort to build another convent. It was Sor María Manuela who would receive a compassionate yet firm answer from the viceroy six weeks later. Although he was willing to assist the convent in any way possible, the viceroy wrote, he saw no reason to attempt to change the king’s decree on the new convents from merely four years’ prior.<sup>84</sup>

In 1795, the nuns of Corpus Christi returned to their campaign, this time flipping the script on Spanish officials’ frequent strategy of burying undesirable petitions under layers of bureaucracy. In a letter to viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, the nuns explained that while they understood that Carlos III had declined to give his royal permission for the convents back in 1785, they wondered if the Spanish Crown had really been fully informed of the particulars of the project. Had the entirety of the Puebla documentation been sent to Madrid, or had the viceroy simply sent a

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<sup>83</sup> Sor María Dominga de Santa Coleta, letter to Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, 26 November 1789, AGN, Templos y Conventos, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 122-122r.

<sup>84</sup> Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, letter to the Abbess of Corpus Christi, 16 January 1790, Templos y Conventos, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3, 123.

summary? Their seemingly innocuous question got results: Güemes Pacheco de Padilla decided to open an investigation into the matter.

This time, the new bishop of Puebla, Salvador Biempica y Sotomayor, supported the nuns' efforts. Like the former bishop, he referenced the high number of existing convents in Puebla, but where bishop López had seen a problem, bishop Biempica saw an opportunity: "In this city of Puebla, there are eleven convents for Spanish women," he explained, "but not one for Indian women...which causes them unhappiness." Moreover, the bishop pointed out the large indigenous populations that resided in his diocese, assuring the viceregal court that these groups would be happy to contribute towards a convent.<sup>85</sup> One of the members of the viceregal court, however, *fiscal de los indios* Ambrosio Saparzurieta, was skeptical. Certainly, the number of indigenous people living in the diocese of Puebla was quite large, but the proposed convent would not be "for the daughters of Indians in general, but only for the daughters of caciques." He explained further that he had seen that the vast social differences between the *macehuelos* [commoners] and the caciques caused resentment and conflict, making it even less likely that non-noble indigenous people would want to donate to the project.<sup>86</sup>

The nuns of Corpus Christi leapt at the chance to respond to the *fiscal*, but their efforts would backfire. In a letter written to the viceregal court a few weeks after the *fiscal's* statement, Madre María Manuela, the abbess of Corpus Christi, asserted that the difference between *cacicas* and *macehuales* was not as vast as the *fiscal* believed, and that an intermediary class of *principales* helped bridge the gap. Usually, *principal*

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<sup>85</sup> Salvador Biempica y Sotomayor, letter to the viceregal court, 16 February 1796, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Bienes Nacionales/Caja 1376/32099/12/Exp 12.

<sup>86</sup> Statement of Ambrosio Saparzurieta, 9 January 1797, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 25.

referred to a person who was related to an indigenous ruling family, but not in direct line of descendance of the ruler. Madre Maria Manuela, however, claimed a very broad definition of this term. She explained that she considered a *principal* woman to be “any Native daughter whose father had an honest occupation...even if a humble one.”<sup>87</sup> According to this perspective, the majority of indigenous women in Mexico could qualify to become nuns – precisely what the Corpus Christi convent wanted.

Instead of reassuring Saporzurieta, however, Madre María Manuela’s statement provoked an inquiry into the state of affairs not only at Corpus Christi, but at the convent of Cosamaloapan in Valladolid and the Cacicas’ Convent in Oaxaca as well. The idea that an indigenous nun could come from the lower classes was “very erroneous,” he raged, and required immediate correction. “In order to remedy in the future the abuse [of the law] that has been initiated in the said Convent of Corpus Christi...the reverend abbess of said convent must be officially instructed of the true meaning of the terms *cacique* and *principal*.” Furthermore, Saporzurieta dispatched messages to the other two convents for indigenous women, believing it “very likely that they also follow the same erroneous intelligence.” Finally, he argued that Madre María Manuela’s response had undermined the entire convent proposal. The *raison d’être* of the new convent, he explained, was based in the idea that there was such a high demand to enter Corpus Christi that another such convent simply *had* to be built. Armed with the new information that Corpus Christi had been accepting non-elite indigenous women, Saporzurieta proposed a simpler solution: if Corpus Christi returned to the high standards that its founders originally intended, he argued, the number of applicants would diminish

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<sup>87</sup> Madre Maria Manuela del Corazón de Jesús, letter to the viceregal court, 27 January 1797, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 28-28r.

dramatically: there simply weren't that many noble indigenous women in existence anymore.<sup>88</sup>

The abbesses of both Cosamaloapan and the Cacicas' Convent wrote back to the viceregal court in support of Madre María Manuela's position. Madre Maria Ana, the abbess of the Cosamaloapan convent, reported that she had considered any indigenous woman who was "a pure, decent, Indian" as an acceptable candidate to enter the convent.<sup>89</sup> When questioned by the *fiscal*, Madre Teodora in Oaxaca, perhaps more aware of the contentiousness of this issue, equivocated a bit: "Here, we admit cacicas and *principales*," she explained. While the convent's constitution did permit non-noble women to enter, she added, the convent had prioritized admitting cacica women, meaning that the Cacicas' Convent was currently aligned with the standards proposed by the *fiscal*.<sup>90</sup> In her response, Madre Teodora struck a careful balance, supporting the idea that all indigenous women could become nuns without directly challenging the *fiscal's* understanding of the social hierarchies of noble and common classes. Across all three convents, however, it seemed that the nuns were willing to accept any indigenous woman into their convent, making their institutions more focused on ethnicity rather than class identity.

The immediate result of the conflict, however, was the silencing of Madre María Manuela. Once the responses from the three convents had been gathered, the priest assigned as Corpus Christi's spiritual director, Father José Joaquín de Ugarzibal, decided

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<sup>88</sup> Statement of Ambrosio Saparzurieta, 7 February 1797, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 30r-33.

<sup>89</sup> Madre María Ana del Santísimo Sacramento, letter to the viceregal court, 12 April 1797, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 37.

<sup>90</sup> Madre Maria Teodora de San Agustín, letter to the viceregal court, 7 April 1787, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 36-36r.

to intervene. He wrote a long letter of apology to the *fiscal*, removing Madre Maria Manuela from the negotiations. The abess, he wrote, had misunderstood the convent's rules – women who could not prove that they were related to indigenous nobility had never and would never be accepted as nuns. “On all of these details,” he explained, “the abess is now sufficiently instructed.” Madre Maria Manuela, for her part, seemed to have apologized for the confusion as well, but she lost textual agency over her own words: Ugarzibal simply offered her “humble and religious sincerity” in correcting her error.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, the convents of Cosamaloapan and the Cacicas' Convent were placed under stricter supervision.<sup>92</sup>

Surprisingly, this debate did not put a complete halt to the Puebla convent proposal. In his letter, Ugarzibal suggested that perhaps the Puebla convent could admit non-elite women, even as the other three convents maintained their requirements to only admit cacicas. Perhaps coming from a creole priest, this suggestion was apparently not as threatening, and the viceregal court and diocese of Puebla continued to ascertain the possibility of constructing a new convent. While other members of the viceregal court became convinced that the convent was a good idea, Saporzurieta remained opposed. Eventually, the viceroy, Miguel José de Azanza Alegría, decided to send the entire packet of documents off to Carlos IV.<sup>93</sup> Although the Corpus Christi nuns tried one last appeal,

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<sup>91</sup> José Joaquín de Ugarzibal, letter to the viceregal court, 7 June 1797, AGN Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 38-42r.

<sup>92</sup> Statement of Ambrosio Saporzurieta, 5 March 1799, AGN Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004, 80-80r.

<sup>93</sup> Sor María Felipa et al, letter to Carlos IV, 27 July 1799, AGN Instituciones Coloniales/Bienes Nacionales/Caja 1376/32099/12/Exp 12; Declaration of Carlos IV, 25 June 1800, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 4384/9463/4/Exp 004, 5-5r.

writing directly to the king to beg his approval, it was to no avail: the request was denied by Carlos IV on June 25, 1800.<sup>94</sup>

Although the Puebla campaign was the longest-lasting effort of indigenous nuns to establish additional convents, it was not the only attempt. The idea for another convent, to be located in the town of Dolores in the region of Guanajuato, emerged as late as 1809. The project was primarily spearheaded by Mariano de Abasolo, who interestingly enough would go on to be a leader in the Mexican independence movement. Over the course of a year, he gathered promises of donations from local indigenous villages and signatures of support from priests. On one occasion, however, Abasolo revealed the true origin of this idea: it was suggested by the indigenous nuns in Valladolid.<sup>95</sup> Initially, the prospects seemed promising: the local diocese supported the petition, and the proposed convent was headed towards viceregal and potentially royal approval when outside political events intervened. The petition arrived in Mexico City in January of 1810, when the viceregal court was barely controlled by archbishop Francisco Javier de Lizana y Beaumont in the tumultuous aftermath of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and deposition of Carlos IV in 1808. There is no evidence that the viceregal court ever reviewed the petition. By September of that year, Abasolo's attention would be drawn to the fight for independence from Spain, and the hopes for another convent in Dolores would never be realized.

The final establishment of a convent for indigenous women in Mexico involved the transformation of the Guadalupe school (see Chapter 1) into a convent staffed by

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<sup>94</sup> Declaration of Carlos IV, 25 June 1800, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja 0218/5297/4/Expediente 004.

<sup>95</sup> Declaration of don José María Gonzales, doña María Micaela Rodriguez, and don José Mariano de Abasolo, 4 Feb 1809, "Sobre fundación de un convento de Monjas Capuchinas en la congregación de Dolores," NL, Ayer MS 1147, 17.

teaching order nuns. In February 1806, the *colegialas* at the Guadalupe school gathered together to sign a document asking that the school's director, Juan Francisco de Castañiza y González (also known as the Marques de Castañiza), "procure and promote through all possible measures...the elevation of this school into a convent." They were certain that king Carlos IV, "in consequence of the paternal love with which he has always looked upon our nation, His Piety would deign to concede to us this new favor." By "nation," the *colegialas* meant Indians; references to Mexico as a nation were still a decade away. The document was written by *colegiala* María Josefa del Corral and signed by twenty others, including rectress María Petra Elviro (see Chapter 1). Del Corral herself signed on behalf of seven other *colegialas*, who were apparently unable to sign their names themselves.<sup>96</sup>

Although the initial document didn't explain why the *colegialas* wanted to change their school into a convent, the Marques de Castañiza submitted a longer letter detailing all the reasons. The school, he argued, had been founded as a place where indigenous women could live out their lives in quietness, prayer, and service to God through the education of Native and mixed-race girls. The *colegialas*, he explained, already followed the rules of poverty, chastity, and obedience – the same standards that governed religious women – but without the formality of professed vows. The *colegialas*' efforts to live such perfect lives, however, were frequently interrupted by the demands of the community. While the school was intended to be a semi-cloistered space, reserved only for the use of the *colegialas* and the Guadalupe students, parents, families, and friends often tried to see the interior of the school, "provoked by curiosity...and easily find pretexts to rupture the cloister." If the school were transformed into a convent, the Marques argued, "it would be

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<sup>96</sup> Statement of María Petra Elviro et. al, 21 February 1806, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Regio Patronato Indiano/Colegios/Volumen 8, Exp 3, 48-48r.

beneficial for the education of the Indians as well as those of other classes, both because the lives of the nuns will be better-structured, contributing to the better education of the youth, and because the public will have a different understanding of a convent as compared to a school.” In other words, the Marques believed that the public would have more respect for the rules of a convent than they would have for a school, allowing the women in charge of the school more freedom to live in compliance with the spiritual life they desired.<sup>97</sup>

The Marques’ statement also indicated that connections between institutions for indigenous women in Mexico City remained strong. He mentioned that the new convent would provide another option for Native women, given that there were only three existing convents in all of Mexico that accepted indigenous women. As he noted, all three followed the strict Capuchin rule, which could exclude women whose health prevented them from a life of such severe ascetism, and only accepted *cacicas*, which excluded women of the lower classes. (The Marques’ statement is further evidence that the religious and political officials had won out over the Corpus Christi nuns regarding the definition of *cacica*, *principal*, and honorable women a decade prior: it seems to be a *fait accompli* that only *cacicas* were now entering those convents.) The new Guadalupe convent, he claimed, would provide an option for religious life for those women that had been excluded from the existing convents. He also referenced the school for indigenous girls that had been approved for construction in Tlatelolco (see Chapter One), arguing that the Guadalupe convent-school and the Tlatelolco school would balance each other out. Indigenous women who wanted to become vowed nuns and teach could go to

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<sup>97</sup> Don Juan Francisco de Castañiza y González, letter to the viceregal court, 14 December 1807, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja0167/5246/1/Expediente 001, 6-6r.

Guadalupe, while those who felt called to teach but did not want to take lifelong vows could go to Tlatelolco.<sup>98</sup>

The Guadalupe convent initiative quickly gathered support. Backed by the influential Marqués, other members of the viceregal court also expressed their approval.<sup>99</sup> The project soon had the support of the entire viceregal court, but with two conditions: first, that the convent had to be founded by six Spanish or creole women from the only existing teaching order in Mexico, located in the Convent of the Enseñanza. Secondly, that the convent would require that all women entering give a dowry at the time of their admission. Moreover, students who would live at the school would have to pay six pesos a month for their room and board. Although an exception to the dowry requirement would be made for the current *colegialas*, the founding nuns from the Enseñanza convent were required to transfer their dowries to the new convent. That money, in conjunction with the tuition paid by the students, meant that the new convent was not expected to rely on donations from public coffers – probably the main reason why the entire project was approved so quickly.

Moreover, the idea of a convent-school for indigenous girls fit in well with emerging liberal ideologies in New Spain. As discussed in Chapter 1, Bourbon policies tended to emphasize education and generally supported the establishment of schools. Across the Spanish Empire, the number of schools for girls increased in the late eighteenth century as concepts of citizenship, education, and rationality received greater attention. As one Guatemalan official wrote in 1780, “the education of girls and the

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<sup>98</sup> Don Juan Francisco de Castañiza y González, letter to the viceregal court, 14 December 1807, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja0167/5246/1/Expediente 001, 5-5r, 6r-7.

<sup>99</sup> Testimony of the Sindico Procurador del Común and the Sindico General, 18 February 1808, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja0167/5246/1/Expediente 001, 8r-11r.

rational cultivation of both sexes is an important start for all of society, because as women will become mothers, nobody can ignore the great power they have to inspire the pleasure of learning in their children.”<sup>100</sup> The viceregal court of Mexico was no exception. In 1810, the *síndico del común*, charged with analyzing the financial costs of public projects, pledged his support for the Guadalupe project in a statement full of Enlightenment rhetoric. The Spanish crown, he argued, “has advocated many times for the establishment of schools and other measure that provide for the education of Indians.” This project, he continued, would be an effective method for achieving that goal, because “the benefit would not remain with [the female students] alone; rather, many will go forth and teach their own families, and these families will teach others, and little by little a good upbringing will become hereditary among the Natives.”<sup>101</sup> While the *síndico* apparently believed that further Hispanicization of Mexico’s indigenous population was necessary, he also believed that indigenous women could be the agents of change, and that education could be a path towards the improvement of Mexican culture.

In this case, not even the chaos of Spanish governance after 1808 put a stop to the project. Acting on behalf of the absent king Fernando VII, who had fled to France, the Spanish cabildo gave their “royal” decree of approval to the convent on June 13, 1811.<sup>102</sup> (As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the Tlatelolco school floundered in the same political environment, failing to secure financial support and never actually opening.) In early

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted in Brianna Leavitt-Alcántara, *Alone at the Altar: Single Women and Devotion in Guatemala, 1670-1870* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 103; see also chapter 4 for more on girls’ schools in colonial Guatemala; see Bianca Premo, *Children of the Father King: Youth, Authority & Legal Minority in Colonial Lima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), for more on girls’ schools in colonial Peru.

<sup>101</sup> Statement of the Síndico del Común, 2 January 1810, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal/Caja0167/5246/1/Expediente 001.

<sup>102</sup> Royal Cédula, 13 June 1811, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Regio Patronato Indiano/Templos y Coventos/Volumen 24, 442.

December of that year, the convent officially opened, starting with the transfer of six creole or Spanish nuns from the convent of María Santísima del Pilar y Enseñanza in Mexico City, the only convent inhabited by nuns from a teaching order in Mexico. The official reception of the indigenous women, however, was reserved for a more auspicious day: the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12. Twenty-one former *colegialas*, the same number of women that had signed the 1806 petition, took vows as nuns, along with four other Indian women who had attended the school as students. Within the first few years of the convent's establishment, indigenous women continued to seek entrance into the convent: four more Guadalupe alumnae joined in 1812, and two more the year after that.<sup>103</sup> The convent itself received a new name: in contrast to the already-established convent of María Santísima del Pilar y Enseñanza, this convent was called the convent of the Nueva Enseñanza [New Teaching].

Overall, therefore, religious indigenous women in late colonial Mexico had mixed success in opening new convents for Native women. The Corpus Christi nuns' repeated petitions, supported from a distance by the nuns in Cosamaloapan and the Cacicas' Convent, received attention from high-ranking politicians but never attained official permission. The Dolores convent, proposed by the Cosamaloapan nuns, seemed to have a better chance at success, but was stymied by political events. Only the *colegialas* of the Guadalupe school, who proposed a convent that would be self-sustaining and beneficial to the common good, saw their petitions fully realized. Despite these variations in outcomes, it is clear that Native women who had entered religious

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<sup>103</sup> Madre María Dolores Patiño, letter to the abbess of the convent of the Company of María in Zaragoza, Spain, 30 December 1813, in Pilar Foz y Foz, *La Revolución Pedagógica En Nueva España, 1754-1820: María Ignacia de Azlor y Echeverz y Los Colegios de La Enseñanza*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Instituto "Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo C.S.I.C.", 1981), 200.

institutions generally believed that more convents for indigenous women would be a good thing. They sought to expand the space available at the intersection of Christian and indigenous identity, and invite more women to join them in expressing these identities through formal channels.

Indigenous nuns' advocacy, however, was not limited to work on behalf of convents. They also regularly and effectively advocated for indigenous men with political and religious leaders of colonial Mexico. For example, in 1785 Madre Theodora asked Viceroy Galvez to offer his paternal protection to Don Lorenzo Jose Cabrera, her godson, whom she described as "the only American Indian" to reach the position of business agent of the Crown. A month later, Galvez wrote back to the nuns, informing them that based on their recommendation, he would gladly take Cabrera under his wing.<sup>104</sup>

Often, the nuns explicitly deployed the social capital that they had gained as nuns in their requests for benefits for indigenous men. In one case, a group of four nuns from Corpus Christi asked that *cacique* Don Miguel Mariano de Luna be instated as an official translator of the court, based partly on his service in overseeing the convent's annual feast-day celebrations: "He has given general evidence of his good conduct through the care he took in organizing the recent celebrations of Corpus Christi," they explained.<sup>105</sup> In another example, the connection between the nuns' contributions to Mexican society and the justification for their request on behalf of an indigenous man was made even clearer. In 1786 the abbess of Corpus Christi, Madre María Sebastiana, argued that the

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<sup>104</sup> Madre María Teodora and Sor María Clara de Santa Gertrudis, letter to Bernardo Vicente de Galvez y Madrid, 17 June 1785, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 291-291r; Bernardo Vicente de Galvez y Madrid, letter to Madre Theodora and Sor Clara, 16 July 1785, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1, 292.

<sup>105</sup> Madre Felipa de Jesús et al, letter to Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 1 June 1773, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

viceroys should give a salaried government position to don Juan Nepucemo de Salazar, Madre Teodora's brother, based on his sister's merits. "He is the brother of Reverend Madre Maria Theodora," explained the nuns, "...to whose efforts and religiosity the foundation of Siete Príncipes is indebted (circumstances worthy of Your Excellency's attention)."<sup>106</sup> The letter mentioned that don Salazar had already submitted a petition to the viceroy, but hadn't received a response. The bulk of Madre Sebastiana's letter, however, focused on Madre Teodora's virtues, as well as the gratitude of the nuns of Corpus Christi, who did not doubt in the "charity and paternal love" which they were certain would govern the viceroy's decision. In other words, the nuns used the same strategies as when they made requests for their own benefit: they drew upon their reputations as holy women and also positioned themselves as daughters.

The request on behalf of Madre Teodora's brother also underlines the ways that the convents remained connected to – and in fact, helped reinforce – indigenous networks that spanned Mexico. The Corpus Christi nuns' request on behalf of Madre Teodora's brother, for example, was made five years after she had moved to Oaxaca. While historians and scholars, including myself, have been unable to find archival evidence of letters exchanged between nuns in the indigenous convents, there must have been some type of communication between the convents in order for the Corpus Christi nuns to learn of Madre Teodora's brother's needs. Or perhaps don Salazar had approached the Corpus Christi himself, hoping that they would stand in as family members and advocates for him, now that his sister was far removed. Corpus Christi apparently also had connections to the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán, an educational

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<sup>106</sup> Madre Maria Sebastiana, letter to Bernardo Vicente de Galvez y Madrid, 21 February 1786, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

institution designed primarily for mestizos. In 1794, the nuns of Corpus Christi asked viceroy Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas to approve a grant for a male student who hoped to enter there. Unfortunately, information about the student, which was apparently included along with Corpus Christi letter, was at some point separated from the nuns' petition, making it unclear if the student was mestizo or indigenous, and impossible to trace exactly what his connections to Corpus Christi were. The archival record, however, does indicate that the viceroy viewed the nuns' petition favorably, and notified the rector of the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán that money was on its way.<sup>107</sup> The indigenous nuns, therefore, were quite enmeshed in Native networks in Mexico City in particular. They were both aware of the needs and desires of indigenous men living in the city, and willing to use their influence with the viceroys on behalf of these men.

Overall, therefore, Native women across Mexico regularly entered exclusively-indigenous convents, a decision which clearly positioned them at the intersection of indigenous identity and Christian practice. They used this unique positionality to advocate both for themselves and for other indigenous people by securing funding for convents, petitioning to open additional convents, and advocating for indigenous men and women outside of the convent walls. They gained influence with viceroys and bishops based on their reputation for holiness, and worked to augment this influence by developing personal relationships with these men. They then deployed the social capital they had accumulated on behalf of themselves and others of their ethnicity. These strategies, of course, did not mean that the women would always achieve their goals: the

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<sup>107</sup> Sor María Manuela del Corazon de Jesús, letter to viceroy Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, 4 January 1794, and Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, letter to the [unnamed] rector of the Colegio de San Juan Letrán, 15 January 1794, both in AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/2/Exp 2, 465-466.

failure of the Puebla convent proposal and the subsequent reprimanding of the nuns' for their attempt to stretch definitions of class among indigenous groups is a clear example of the limits of the nuns' powers of persuasion. Nevertheless, these strategies were relatively successful in the late colonial period. As Mexico became an independent nation, however, the nuns' influence would have less and less of an effect, until the closure of the convents in the 1860s completely ended this particular method of enacting agency for indigenous women.

### **History of the Cacicas' Convent, 1857 - 1908**

In the late 1850s, the Cacicas' Convent remained a place of importance within the cityscape of the capital city of Oaxaca – now simply known as Oaxaca itself, instead of the colonial name of Antequera. Four novices became fully professed nuns in February, 1857; the total number of women living in the convent seems to have been around twenty.<sup>108</sup> The convent was regularly receiving donations, both large and small, from community members: one woman instructed her heirs to give a five-peso donation to the convent annually, or “whenever they could,” while a man bequeathed to the convent a portion of the rent he earned from a house in the city.<sup>109</sup>

The times, however, were changing. In the aftermath of the Mexican-American war (1846-1848), general Antonio López de Santa Anna, a Conservative politician generally sympathetic to the Catholic Church, had attempted to hold onto power, but was ousted by the Liberal Plan de Ayutla (1854). This would end up being the starting point

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<sup>108</sup> “Las que viven...”, undated [1867?], AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/573. In 1860, there were 17 full nuns and five novices living in the convent. See voting record contained in don Nicolas Vasconcelos, letter to the nuns of the Convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, 28 July 1860, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

<sup>109</sup> Will of María Vicente Martínez, 17 April 1857, AHNO, Juan Nepocemo Aguirre, Libro 7, 69r; Monthly financial reports from Sor María Coleta of the Convento de Santa María de los Ángeles, 1857-1858, BJC, Sección Religiosa, Caja 56, Cuentos y Gastos.

of a period known as *La Reforma*, when Liberal politicians moved towards a national rhetoric of individual rights, science, and rationality, in contrast to the corporatist, religious, and traditional practices of the Conservatives.<sup>110</sup> The 1857 Mexican Constitution enshrined for the first time in Mexican history freedom of speech, the right to a non-sectarian education, and the right to bear arms. On the religious front, two articles would deeply impact religious communities: article five, which stated that “the constitution cannot authorize any contract that has for its goal the loss or irrevocable sacrifice of the liberty of mankind, whether it be for work, education, or religious vows.”<sup>111</sup> While this article did not explicitly ban convents and monasteries, it did suggest that life in a convent was fundamentally incompatible with the concept of individual liberty – and that the Mexican government was on the side of individual liberty. Article twenty-seven also limited the ability of religious organizations to acquire any additional property beyond what was precisely required for the primary purpose of the organization. In other words, convent buildings were safe, but any lands or houses that had been bequeathed to them as a source of additional income had to be nationalized.

Convents in Oaxaca soon began to feel the effects of these articles and the general Liberal opposition to religious orders. In 1859, the Cacicas’ Convent lost the income from the house that had been donated to them in 1857; the occupant stopped paying rent to the convent, citing the “nationalization of ecclesiastical goods” as the reason why he no longer needed to pay. The house was eventually returned to the original donors’

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<sup>110</sup> This is, of course, a very simplified description of the political situation in Mexico at mid-century. My understanding of this time period has been particularly shaped by Jackson, *Liberals, the Church, and Indian Peasants*; Mark Wasserman, *Everyday Life and Politics in Nineteenth Century Mexico: Men, Women, and War*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000); Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*; Caplan, *Indigenous Citizens*.

<sup>111</sup> *Constitución Federal de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*, 1857, available online at <http://www.ordenjuridico.gob.mx/Constitucion/1857.pdf>, accessed 17 September 2019. My translation.

heirs.<sup>112</sup> That same year, 1859, the Mexican government ordered that monks be expelled from their monasteries.<sup>113</sup> In January 1862, the Franciscan monastery in Oaxaca was converted into a school for boys, while a female school was opened a few months later, in July 1862, in what had been the Oratorian monastery of San Felipe.<sup>114</sup> A local newspaper in Oaxaca, *La Victoria*, published a story that same summer about a Mexican nun (not from Oaxaca) who had decided to leave her convent and marry a former monk. The overall tone of the report implied that this was a happy decision for the couple, who had shed their religious oppression and begun new lives centered on love and liberty.<sup>115</sup> Another editorial in *La Victoria* argued for the importance of the separation of church and state, arguing that it would be beneficial for both the Catholic Church and the Mexican government if the church would remain focused on spiritual matters while the government took care of temporal concerns.<sup>116</sup>

Although convents for women in Oaxaca remained open in the early 1860s, as opposed to the closure of monasteries for men, certain communities began to be combined in response to a federal order passed in 1861.<sup>117</sup> The first to fall was the convent of Santa Catalina, which at the time housed thirteen nuns. The federal government had requested the convent grounds for the construction of a prison, and with the support of the regional government, the nuns of Santa Catalina were transferred to the convent of La Concepción. On February 11, 1862, city council meeting minutes recorded

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<sup>112</sup> “El ventitres de julio de 1859 se publicó...” 2 Dec 1859, BJDc, Fondo Luis Castañeda Gúzman, Sección Religiosa, Caja 56, Cuentos y Gastos

<sup>113</sup> Andrés Portillo, *Oaxaca en el Centenario* (Oaxaca: Imprenta del Estado, 1909), 106.

<sup>114</sup> “Se trabaja activamente...” *La Victoria*, 10 Nov 1861, 4; “A las doce se inauguraba la escuela central...” *La Victoria*, 9 Jan 1862, 4; “Colegio de Señoras,” *La Victoria*, 17 July 1862, 4.

<sup>115</sup> “Historia de una monja...” *La Victoria*, 8 May 1862, 1-2.

<sup>116</sup> Urbano Lechuga (pen name), “Independencia entre la Iglesia y el Estado,” *La Victoria*, 31 May 1863, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Charles Redmon Berry, *The Reform in Oaxaca, 1856-76: A Microhistory of the Liberal Revolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 76.

simply that the convent of Santa Catalina had been ceded to the city government for use as a jail.<sup>118</sup> *La Victoria* reported that the transition had gone smoothly, and that in fact the nuns were grateful for the change. According to the article, many of the thirteen nuns of Santa Catalina were elderly, and the large grounds of the convent were both “immense and uncared for...becoming uncomfortable for the nuns.”<sup>119</sup> The combination of Santa Catalina and La Concepción, the newspaper argued in a different article, would provide both communities with “convenient levels of independence” in a “large and comfortable convent,” while permitting the use of Santa Catalina for the benefit of the state.<sup>120</sup>

This process would soon affect the Cacicas’ Convent as well. By 1865, nuns from both Santa Catalina and La Concepción would be living within the walls of the Cacicas’ Convent. In March of 1865, a representative of the archdiocese visited the Cacicas’ Convent building to gather the communities’ votes for abbess. The voting records indicated that seventeen women belonged to the Conceptionist community, while there were twenty Capuchin nuns from the Cacicas’ Convent. Both records mention that the elections took place in the convent of Santa María de los Ángeles, the official name of the Cacicas’ Convent.<sup>121</sup> Although there is no indication of the number of women from Santa Catalina who were living in the Cacicas’ Convent, a note signed by the abbess of Santa Catalina in June, 1865, indicates that she and her community did in fact reside there.<sup>122</sup> Two other convents, that of San José and the Nuestra Señora de la Soledad,

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<sup>118</sup> Oaxaca city council records, 11 February 1862, Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Ciudad de Oaxaca, Ordinaria, Libro 009, 100r – 102r.

<sup>119</sup> “La translación de las religiosas de Santa Catalina,” *La Victoria*, 16 March 1862, 4.

<sup>120</sup> “Translación de religiosas,” *La Victoria*, 7 March 1862, 4.

<sup>121</sup> “En este convent de Santa María de los Ángeles” [Conceptionist elections], 20 March 1865, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574; “Tabla de elecciones” [Capuchin elections], 22 March 1865, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

<sup>122</sup> “Quedó enterada esta Comunidad de Catalinas,” 24 June 1865, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

apparently remained in their own buildings. The Soledad convent, inhabited by Recollect nuns, was the wealthiest female convent in Oaxaca and closely connected to the Basilica of Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, one of the patronesses of Oaxaca – both factors that might have caused the convent to remain relatively untouched.<sup>123</sup> The exclusion of the Capuchins at San José, however, seems slightly more unusual: they certainly were not a wealthier or larger community than the Catalinas or the Conceptionists. Instead, their exclusion suggests the continued importance of ethnic identity for both San José and the Cacicas' Convent. Most likely, if the San José community and the cacicas had been living together, their communities would have been forced to merge: there would have been no ecclesiastical justification for maintaining two separate communities of women following the exact same rule in the same building.

While female communities in Oaxaca were certainly impacted by the Liberal Reforms, the impact was not initially as drastic as it could have been. On February 26, 1863, Benito Juárez declared that the vows taken by nuns were “opposed to liberty itself, contrary to our laws of religious freedom, and intolerable in a popular republic.” Moreover, he added, the convents depended on public charity, which sucked up resources that would have been better applied to social services and national defense. For those reasons, he concluded, all convents in Mexico must be closed within eight days, along with the exclaustation (removal from the cloister) of all the nuns.<sup>124</sup> As Josefina Muriel

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<sup>123</sup> According to data compiled by Carlos Lira Vásquez, *Arquitectura y sociedad: Oaxaca rumbo a la modernidad, 1790 - 1910* (Tlalpan, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2008), 76–77, the convent of La Soledad was worth 250,000 pesos in 1856, while Santa Catarina was worth 150,000 pesos and the Cacicas' Convent, San José, and the Conceptionist convent were all worth around 70,000-80,000 pesos.

<sup>124</sup> Decree of Benito Juárez, 26 February 1863, as published in *La Victoria*, 28 April 1867, 4.

and Margaret Chowning have shown, these orders were generally followed across most of Mexico in the spring of 1863.<sup>125</sup>

Oaxaca was, however, one of the more conservative and religious regions of Mexico, although this was complicated by the fact of Liberal president Benito Juárez's origins in Oaxaca, as well as the allegiance of certain Zapotec regions to the Liberal cause. Nevertheless, in general, Oaxaca was slow to implement federal reform policies that encompassed Liberal anticlerical perspectives.<sup>126</sup> In particular, Oaxacan leadership seemingly ignored a federal decree in 1863 that ordered the closing of convents entirely. The difference in reaction to the order to close male monasteries, which was accomplished much more quickly, versus the slow response to the order to close female convents, may have had several causes. First of all, the economic impact of requisitioning monastery land was more difficult to ignore: in 1856, there were eight monasteries in Oaxaca, whose combined property value was nearly triple that of the five female convents.<sup>127</sup> Secondly, as was the case when the convent of Santa Catalina was closed, both government and church officials were worried about what would happen to nuns forced to leave their convents, and therefore willing to wait until suitable arrangements could be made. Finally, the mergers of Santa Catalina, La Concepción, and the Cacicas' Convent indicate that Oaxaca may have been slowly progressing towards the elimination of convents, or at least the consolidation of all vowed women into a single location.

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<sup>125</sup> Josefina Muriel, *Conventos de monjas en la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Editorial Santiago, 1946), 513; Margaret Chowning, *Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752-1863* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 253–55.

<sup>126</sup> Berry, *The Reform in Oaxaca, 1856-76*, chapter 3; Guardino, *The Time of Liberty*, 159.

<sup>127</sup> This calculation is drawn from a table of property values of monasteries and convents in 1856 in Lira Vásquez, *Arquitectura y sociedad*, 76–77.

By 1867, however, with the French intervention and the attempt to establish a Mexican monarchy officially ended, and with the Liberals once again firmly in control, Oaxaca's slow progress towards eliminating female convents was no longer acceptable. On April 18, 1867, Felix Díaz, a military commander, brother of Porfirio Díaz, and soon-to-be governor of Oaxaca, wrote a letter later published in *La Victoria* questioning why the exclaustation law had not been applied in Oaxaca. "I strongly encourage, in the name of the law and patriotic devotion, that the nuns be removed from their convents as soon as possible," he thundered.<sup>128</sup> The current governor of Oaxaca, Juan Maldonado, a moderate much more sympathetic to Church interests, tried to claim that the 1863 declaration had never arrived in Oaxaca, and that the government had followed other laws that limited religious communities, such as the closure of male monasteries, offering to return dowries to nuns who voluntarily left their convents, and nationalizing convent landholdings.<sup>129</sup> A government secretary, however, soon surfaced to contradict Maldonado's claims, stating that the decree had in fact been received in Oaxaca.<sup>130</sup> Maldonado quickly folded, acknowledging the validity of the 1863 decree and promising to work quickly to ensure the closure of the convents.<sup>131</sup>

On May 16, 1867, all of the convents in Oaxaca were emptied. A few days prior, a government delegation had visited the convents, informing the nuns of what would be taking place and inviting them to leave voluntarily, but none had accepted this offer.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Felix Díaz, "Con verdadero sentimiento..." *La Victoria*, 21 April 1867, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Juan Maldonado, "Gobierno Politico del estado de Oaxaca," *La Victoria*, 25 April 1867, 1-3.

<sup>130</sup> José Esperon, "Es cierto que cuando fui secretario del estado de Oaxaca..." *La Victoria*, 5 May 1867, 2. See also Berry, *The Reform in Oaxaca*, 114-120, for more on Maldonado's predicament.

<sup>131</sup> Juan Maldonado, "El ciudadano Juan María Maldonado, gobernador provisional del estado de Oaxaca, a sus habitantes..." *La Victoria*, 9 May 1867, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Report by Juan Cruz to the archdiocese of Oaxaca, regarding the closure of the convent of La Soledad, 26 May 1867, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

Throughout the day on May 16, therefore, an armed force proceeded to visit all three convents that housed nuns in Oaxaca. They seem to have gone first to the convent of San José. The newspaper *El Pabellion*, reporting on the exclaustation, did not state a specific arrival time of the troops but noted that the where the nuns met them with “a religious song and prayers” while the abbess came out and informed the soldiers of their “acceptance of the law.”<sup>133</sup> By five o’clock in the afternoon, the troops had arrived at the Cacicas’ Convent, where they rushed inside but prevented the convent’s priestly chaplain from entering, making him “unable to testify” as to exactly what took place within the convent doors before the nuns exited.<sup>134</sup> Within half an hour, the troops had arrived at the convent of La Soledad, where they seemed to face the most resistance. The soldiers took up positions outside the gate at 5:30, but the it wasn’t until 8:15 that night that government officials forced the nuns to leave, violently dragging them out of the convent despite the nuns’ “pleading, crying, and begging.”<sup>135</sup>

Even *La Victoria*, the newspaper which generally advocated for the application of the exclaustation laws, was not entirely unsympathetic to the situation of the nuns. They published a poem lamenting the closure of the convents – “Passing by a convent/an old woman sighed/and cried upon seeing the ruins... ‘religion has been ended!’” – although they also published an editorial decrying convents as unbiblical and undemocratic.<sup>136</sup> Public opinion, therefore, might have been mixed, but the Oaxaca city council tried to move forward with the incorporation of the nuns into a more modern style of life. They

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<sup>133</sup> “El día 16 del presente,” *El Pabellion*, 19 May 1867, 4.

<sup>134</sup> Expediente relativo a la exclaustacion de las religiosas, 24 June 1867, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

<sup>135</sup> Report by Juan Cruz to the archdiocese of Oaxaca, regarding the closure of the convent of La Soledad, 26 May 1867, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

<sup>136</sup> I. G., “Epigrama,” *La Victoria*, 12 May 1867, 4; “Las monjas bajo el aspecto bíblico,” *La Victoria*, 30 May 1867, 1.

appointed a committee of three women, doña Josefa Mejía, doña Guadalupe Orozco, and doña Dominga Griz, to visit the ex-cloistered nuns and help them transition to the secular realm. While unfortunately any reports made by these three women appear to have been lost, mentions of these same women in other contexts indicate that they were from wealthy and influential families and highly involved in charitable organizations.<sup>137</sup> In other words, they were exactly the type of women that the state embraced and hoped would serve as models to the former nuns.

The physical closure of the convent, however, was not the end of the Cacicas' Convent community. Although the nuns were from villages all across Oaxaca, they remained in the capital city, moving individually or in groups as large as four to private homes within the city. It is unclear how these homes were chosen. When possible, it seems that the nuns went to live with relatives: one nun lived with her nephew, while two others lived with their (biological) sisters. Rita Sánchez, the sister of Sor María Luisa and most likely a widow given that she was listed as the head of her household, took in Sor María Luisa as well as three other nuns. The remainder, eleven nuns, were generally sent in groups of two or three to live in other homes: evidence indicates that the households that received these nuns were relatively well-off and involved in upper-class social circles within Oaxaca.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> "De la doña Guadalupe Orozco y Encisco participa..." Oaxaca city council records, 20 March 1877, Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Cuidad de Oaxaca, Ordinaria, libro 032, Exp 07, 13r-14r; "De Regina Grandison de Finke y Guadalupe Orozco y Encisco..." Oaxaca city council records, 16 December 1890, Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Cuidad de Oaxaca, Ordinaria, libro 059, Exp. 13, 36r-39r.

<sup>138</sup> Of the five households that received nuns but indicated no biological connection with any of the women, I was able to find information about two. Don Felipe Besares was head of the public hospital in Oaxaca, while don Juan Trapaga was listed in census records as a married businessman. Information about Besares in "Reunidos los Señores Concejales..." 12 September 1866, Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Cuidad de Oaxaca, Ordinario, Libro 012, Exp 19, 24r-26r; information about Trapaga in "Padrón para elecciones," Cuartel 4, sección 23, manzanas 1a, 2a, 9a, 10, 15, y 16, 1877, Archivo Histórico Municipal de la Cuidad de Oaxaca<sup>3</sup>, Secretaria Municipal, tomo V, caja 11. Information about housing for all the nuns comes from

Within these homes, the nuns tried to maintain their vows and daily observances of prayer as much as possible. As the bishop (later archbishop) of Oaxaca, Eulogio Gregorio Clemente Gillow y Zavalza, reported in 1889, the nuns remained in their homes and refused to leave even to attend Mass, believing that their vows of enclosure superceded their obligation to attend Mass. (Gillow attempted to remedy the issue by sending priests to the individual homes to say Mass for the former nuns as often as possible.)<sup>139</sup> The nuns also maintained their hierarchy and leadership. In 1870, the bishop Vicente Fermín Márquez y Carrizosa of Oaxaca requested special permission from the pope to allow the abbesses of the ex-cloistered communities to remain in their positions for a term longer than three years, given the difficulty of gathering all the nuns together to hold a new election.<sup>140</sup>

For the Cacicas' Convent community, the abbess at the time of ex-claustration, Sor María Luisa, most likely retained her position until her death, which occurred in 1877 according to historian Luis Castañeda Guzman.<sup>141</sup> One letter indicates that Sor María Asunción, who had been identified as the vicaress in 1873, had become abbess herself by 1881.<sup>142</sup> In 1883, another election for abbess was held. The records indicate that the diocese of Oaxaca sent a representative to the remaining nuns in order to gather their votes for abbess. Madre María Rafaela, who had entered the convent in 1849, was

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"Las que viven..." undated [circa 1867], AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/573 and "Informe de la abedesa," 22 January 1873, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575.

<sup>139</sup> Eulogio Gregorio Clemente Gillow y Zavalza, "Apuntes históricos sobre el Obispado de Antequera y Arzobispado de Oaxaca" (1889), quoted in Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> Vincent Fermin, letter to Pope Pius IX, 5 August 1870, BJDc, Sección Religiosa, Caja 54, Correspondencia.

<sup>141</sup> Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*, 58.

<sup>142</sup> "Informe de la abedesa," 22 January 1873, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575; Unsigned letter, to Sor María Asunción, December 1881, BJDc, Sección Religiosa, Caja 54, Correspondencia.

elected. The process was repeated at least once more in 1896, when the convent held another election due to the death of Madre María Rafaela: Madre María Teresa de Jesús, one of the last nuns to have entered the convent, was elected abbess.<sup>143</sup>

The ability of the former Cacica nuns to hold these elections also indicates that they were communicating amongst themselves and aware of which ex-nuns were still alive and keeping their vows. While most evidence of this communication has been lost, a couple of letters have survived. For example, in 1876 the former nuns living in doña Rita Sanchez's house wrote to Madre María Luisa, thanking her for her letter to them. While Madre María Luisa's letter does not appear in the archival records, she had apparently informed the group in doña Sanchez's house that she and the other women living with her were "well and had nothing new to report." The ex-nuns in doña Sanchez's house, calling themselves "your daughters," replied that they were also all healthy. They sent along a few donations that they had gathered, and asked that Madre María Luisa buy them a book on contemplative prayer.<sup>144</sup> The letter demonstrates that the former nuns still saw Madre María Luisa as the head of their community, and that she had control over their limited finances as well. Nearly a decade later, an unnamed Cacica nun would write a shorter letter to the new abbess of the community, Madre María Asunción, calling her "'my beloved little Mother [*madrecita*] of my affection" and indicating that the letter-writer's health was good.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Nombramiento de Abadesa, 30 November 1883, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575; Gillow y Zavalza, Archbishop Eulogio Gregorio Clemente, letter to Madre María Teresa de Jesús, 21 November 1893, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574; Nombramiento de Abadesa, 12 August 1896, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575.

<sup>144</sup> R. Sánchez, letter to Madre María Luisa, 21 December 1876, BJdC, Fondo Luis Castañeda Guzmán, Sección Religiosa, Caja 54, Correspondencia.

<sup>145</sup> Unsigned letter, to Sor María Asunción, December 1881, BJdC, Sección Religiosa, Caja 54, Correspondencia.

Moreover, the nuns continued to maintain their reputation as spiritual authorities within Oaxaca. An 1873 letter from a Oaxacan peasant, Faustino José, to Madre María Luisa, indicates not only that local Oaxaca residents were aware of the existence and the housing locations of the Cacica ex-nuns, but also that they continued to seek out the nuns' advice on spiritual matters. José's letter, specifically, deals with questions of priestly misconduct: if a priest was known to be drunk while performing a baptism, he asked, would that baptism still be valid? "Madre, I don't have anyone else to confide in," he concluded, "only you...please tell me the truth about the things of God."<sup>146</sup> While José did not identify himself as indigenous, the high indigenous population of rural Oaxaca and the fact that he turned specifically to a Cacica nun for his questions indicates that he probably saw some commonalities between Madre María Luisa and himself.

Without a physical space to inhabit or the ability to accept new nuns, however, the Cacicas' convent community was unsustainable over the long term. In 1865, when the last recorded elections within the convent were held, nineteen nuns voted. Two years later, seventeen nuns would go live in private homes in Oaxaca, while remaining part of the convent community. By 1873, when Madre María Luisa submitted a report to the diocese, there were only fourteen nuns. Most likely, three had died: all of the women whose names disappeared between 1867 and 1873 had been among the oldest in the community, having entered the Cacicas' convent in the 1830s. By 1877, according to historian Luis Castañeda Gúzman, there were only nine nuns living. Nevertheless, throughout the 1880s, occasional references to the Cacica nuns surface, primarily in the diocesan records. Apparently, the diocese took responsibility for the health of the nuns,

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<sup>146</sup> Faustino José, letter to Madre María Luisa, 22 January 1873, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575.

paying for the medical care of Sor María Asunción, the former abbess, and Sor Dolores in 1886.<sup>147</sup> An official communication from the diocese to all five former convent communities, including the Cacicas' convent, informed them of the arrival of a new bishop to Oaxaca in 1887.<sup>148</sup> By the time the community carried out its last election in 1896, there were only five nuns remaining to vote.<sup>149</sup> According to an unattributed crayon portrait of Sor María Teresa, reprinted in Luis Castañeda Gúzman's history of the convent, she died on February 28, 1908, the last of the Cacica nuns.

The rise and fall of the Cacicas' convent, therefore, reflects broader trends in Mexican history. When it first opened, the Cacicas' Convent had relied upon Spanish legal codes and ecclesiastical support. Skills that were specifically applicable to colonial rule, like Madre Teodora's expert deployment of affective rhetoric to acquire financial donations for the viceroy, helped solidify the convent's place in the city landscape and ensured that the convent could function at or near maximum capacity for several decades. Emerging anti-corporatist policies, targeting both the church and indigenous communities, made it more difficult for the Cacicas' Convent to survive in the first few decades post-Independence. Nevertheless, new applicants continued to solicit a place in the convent throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and female leadership of the convent and the preservation of their reputation as holy women continued. When the application of the Reform Laws eradicated the legal structures that had provided for their physical needs, however, the Cacicas' convent community began a slow but steady

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<sup>147</sup> Receipt of payment, 30 January 1886, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/574.

<sup>148</sup> Diocese of Oaxaca, letter to the abbesses of the Convent of Capuchinas Españolas, Convent of La Soledad, Convent of La Concepcion, Convent of Santa Maria de los Angeles, and Convent of Santa Catarina, 27 December 1887, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575.

<sup>149</sup> Nombramiento de Abadesa, 12 August 1896, AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/575.

decline. Government officials no longer found the examples of indigenous nuns compelling, nor did they feel inclined to offer the women any sort of special protection or influence. The patchy documentary record of the convent community after 1867 does indicate that the former nuns maintained their reputations as spiritual leaders among indigenous villagers, but this positionality no longer earned them the social capital that they had deployed so effectively during the colonial period. For the nuns of the Cacicás' Convent, the window of opportunity to enact agency through being a "Holy Indian Woman" had closed.

**Chapter 6: “A Practical and Exemplary Christian”<sup>1</sup>:  
Brothertown and Stockbridge Women in New York and Wisconsin, 1782 – 1837**

The people of Brothertown were not alone in their efforts to establish an independent Christian Indian community in upstate New York: the foundation of their tribe was shortly followed by the migration of Mohican people from Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to upstate New York, where they likewise hoped to escape the pressure of white settler colonialism. Although the legal negotiations for the creation of both communities were handled primarily by men, women had a major impact on the growth and development of the two tribes. Using many of the same gendered strategies as the girls at Moor’s Indian Charity School (see chapter 2), women developed relationships with missionaries and other powerful male leaders, helping them secure more economic autonomy for their tribes and increasing women’s own influence. In fact, intentionally positioning themselves at the intersection of indigenous and Christian identity opened doors for Brothertown and Stockbridge women, allowing them to achieve unique positions, such as the first female indigenous schoolteacher to be recognized by a missionary society. Nevertheless, as federal policy became increasingly dedicated to settler expansion and indigenous removal, the strategies deployed by Brothertown and Stockbridge women became less effective. These same federal pressures also pushed Brothertown and Stockbridge men to adopt more patriarchal norms, in an effort to align with Anglo-American values in the hopes that this would help them hold onto their lands. These two factors caused the decline of Brothertown and Stockbridge women’s public influence by the 1840s.

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<sup>1</sup> Gravestone of Esther Poquiantup, quoted in Pomroy Jones, *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County* (Rome, NY: Published by the author, 1851), 271, <http://archive.org/details/annalsrecollecti00jone>.

## New Stockbridge

In the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, the history of the Brothertown tribe became closely intertwined with that of another group: the indigenous people of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. A missionary village established by John Sergeant on the Housatonic River among the Mohicans of western Massachusetts, it was here that a number of future Brothertown settlers had taken refuge while the Revolutionary War made the contemplated move to upstate New York too dangerous.<sup>2</sup> Following in the tradition of “Praying Indian” towns that had been created in eastern Massachusetts and Connecticut, in 1737 Sergeant had established a mission among the Mohicans that aimed to “civilize” and “Christianize” them simultaneously.<sup>3</sup> The Mohicans, for their part, had long viewed themselves as intermediaries between various indigenous groups, and later with European groups, and may have seen an alliance with Sergeant as a continuation of that approach.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, many Mohican families from along the Housatonic River Valley migrated to Stockbridge, perhaps hoping to bolster their chances of survival in a world that was becoming dominated by the English. However, a number of Anglo-American families also moved to the settlement, supposedly to serve as examples to the indigenous

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<sup>2</sup> The terms “Mahican” and “Mohican” often cause confusion. Both are English variations of the Algonquian word Muh-he-con-nuk, and some historians and ethnographers use the two spellings interchangeably while others assert that one label pertains to a certain portion of the other label. Because the current descendants of the Stockbridge use the term “Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians,” I use that spelling as well. See Hendrick Aupaumut, “History of the Muh-He-Con-Nuk Indians (1790),” in *American Indian Nonfiction: An Anthology of Writing, 1760s-1930s*, ed. Bernard C. Peyer (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 63–71; James W. Oberly, *A Nation of Statesmen: The Political Culture of the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans, 1815-1972* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), 5; Rachel Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 255n1.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope*, 39.

neophytes in both religious and agricultural issues; within ten years there were ten of these families. The Mohicans quickly noticed that the white settlers allotted themselves the choicest tracts of land, and that the families showed a clear propensity to claim additional land for their children and extended family members.<sup>5</sup> While the indigenous residents of Stockbridge, who were becoming known as Stockbridge Indians rather than Mohicans, tried to petition the colonial courts to slow or halt this influx, the decade of violence surrounding the French and Indian War made the New York assembly less sympathetic to Indian claims of land. And the aftermath of that war – which included a new line of demarcation that generally permitted white settlement throughout the entirety of Massachusetts – only increased white migration. As historian Rachel Wheelock noted, by the mid-1760s, “Stockbridge was well on its way to becoming a New England town...with a marginalized Indian population.”<sup>6</sup> In the time of the Revolutionary War, the original Christian Indian identity of Stockbridge and its relative proximity to Oneida territory made it a popular destination for indigenous coastal New England migrants who were forced to wait out the end of the war before being able to settle in upstate New York. Nevertheless, it had already become clear that Stockbridge itself was not the ideal that Native people had hoped for.

Consequently, when the Brothertown founders left Stockbridge to go to their new settlement, many Stockbridge Indians followed suit.<sup>7</sup> Documents from as early as 1785 indicate that the Oneida had bequeathed a tract of land to the Stockbridge before the

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<sup>5</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope*, 186.

<sup>7</sup> David J. Silverman, *Red Brethren: The Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians and the Problem of Race in Early America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 122; see also Samuel Kirkland to James Bowdoin, 10 March 1784, Hamilton College Library Digital Collections, Samuel Kirkland Papers, yhm-arc-kir-085c.

move began, similar to their conveyance to the Brothertown. The status of this gift, however, had come into question due to the 1785 Treaty of Fort Herkimer, in which the Oneida had been pressured to sell a large portion of their territory to the state of New York, including the region originally designated for Stockbridge. In the aftermath of the treaty, both the Brothertown and Stockbridge negotiated independently with the state government to ensure that their land claims in New York were preserved. For example, Hendrick Aupaumut, an influential Stockbridge sachem, argued strongly that the land had been transferred into Stockbridge control and could not be included in Oneida cessions.<sup>8</sup> The 1788 treaty of Fort Schuyler, which finalized the agreements of the 1784 treaty, did include land specifically designated for the two tribes -- although the Oneida were somewhat unhappy about how both groups had negotiated independently with the state government to secure their place.<sup>9</sup>

The Stockbridge also reached out to other tribes to strengthen their population numbers in New York. In the mid-1790s, Hendrick Aupaumut initiated conversations with the Delaware tribe of New Jersey, long considered the “grandfathers” of the Mohicans, inviting them to move to Stockbridge. In 1796, three Delaware chiefs visited Stockbridge to help them decide whether or not to accept this invitation. Aupamut’s speech on the occasion used a mix of Christian and traditional indigenous imagery to persuade the Delaware. He also noted that in Stockbridge, the Delaware would “have the privilege of hearing the glad tidings of the Gospel preached, and your children will be

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<sup>8</sup> Hendrick Aupaumut to Governor George Clinton, 11 April 1795, quoted in William A. Starna, *From Homeland to New Land: A History of the Mahican Indians, 1600-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 203.

<sup>9</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 129; Starna, *From Homeland to New Land*, 203–9.

instructed to read and write.”<sup>10</sup> But he also peppered his speech with references to indigenous traditions, specifically to emphasize how the Stockbridge had already and would continue to welcome the Delaware. “I take wees-quos in which our ancestors used to put healing oil, and oil your legs and feet,” he told the Delaware chiefs, and “I spread this unnuhkon, or mat, wide on which I put you.”<sup>11</sup> These Delaware had also developed an identity that included Christianity; since 1760, many of them had been living at a mission site run by John Brainerd at a location called Brotherton, New Jersey.<sup>12</sup>

The move by the Delaware in some ways further highlighted the connections between Stockbridge and Brothertown. Bartholomew Calvin, one of the Delaware chiefs who agreed on the move to Stockbridge, would have been known to some of the Brothertown founders: his older brother, Hezekiah Calvin, had attended Moor’s Indian Charity School along with students like David Fowler and Joseph Johnson.<sup>13</sup> Samuel Kirkland, who had preached to the Oneidas sometimes accompanied by David Fowler, Joseph Johnson, or Hezekiah Calvin, also spent time living in Stockbridge.<sup>14</sup> Daniel Simon, a Narragansett from Charlestown, RI who had been educated at Moor’s, taught

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<sup>10</sup> Speech of Hendrick Aupaumut to the Delawares, 7 October 1796, Haverford College, Henry Simmons Letterbooks [hereafter HC - HSL], Vol. 1, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Speech of Hendrick Aupaumut to the Delawares, 7 October 1796, HC-HSL, Vol. 1, 33-35.

<sup>12</sup> While spellings of both locations vary, the New Jersey site is typically spelled Brotherton while the New York/Wisconsin tribe is Brothertown. Given the connections between the New Jersey Delawares at Brotherton and some of the future founders of Brothertown, it is tempting to assume the name Brothertown was at least partly inspired by the name of the mission site, but there is no mention of such a connection in the extant sources.

<sup>13</sup> Brothertown Peacemaker Caroline K. Andler, “Shawuskukhkung - Bartholomew Scott Calvin,” *Brothertown Citizen* (blog), accessed 13 May 2019, <https://brothertowncitizen.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/bartholomew-scott-calvin-article-by-caroline-k-andler.pdf>; Camilla Townsend and et al, “‘I Am Old and Weak ... and You Are Young and Strong ...’: The Intersecting Histories of Rutgers University and the Lenni Lenape,” in *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*, by Marisa J. Fuentes and Deborah Gray White, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 30; James Dow McCallum, *The Letters of Eleazar Wheelock’s Indians* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Publications, 1932), 293–98.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Kirkland’s signature on the Petition of Stockbridge Indians to New York Assembly, 13 October 1780, CSA, Indian Papers, Series 1, Vol. 2, p 226.

school in Stockbridge for a short period around 1780 and also taught at a school in Brotherton, NJ in 1783.<sup>15</sup> While he never relocated to Brothertown, NY, other members of the Simon family did.<sup>16</sup> Samson Occom frequently preached at both Brothertown and Stockbridge, an arrangement which was formalized in the late summer of 1787, when several Stockbridge leaders requested that Occom serve as a minister to them “in conjunction with Brotherton [sic – they were referring to the New York community], if it be agreeable to them.”<sup>17</sup> Occom would spend most of the remainder of his life – he died in 1792 at age 69 – traveling between the two communities and holding church services in both. While the two tribes maintained separate governances and identities, their close geographical proximity to each other, frequent intermarriages and other sharing of resources, and their shared emphasis on both Christianity and indigenous identity meant that the two tribes often followed a similar trajectory from the 1780s through the 1830s.

### **Brothertown and Stockbridge in New York: Conflict and Government Interference**

When Samson Occom first arrived at Brothertown, New York, in the fall of 1785, he believed it was the culmination of a long-held dream for indigenous sovereignty within a Christian framework: a moment of “joy and gladness from the greatest to the least,” as he would write.<sup>18</sup> The challenges of establishing this type of utopia, however, quickly emerged. Divisions within both tribes over doctrinal and leadership issues created conflict, but the biggest issue would be the same problem they had faced previously: the

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<sup>15</sup> George Flemming, *Brotherton: New Jersey's First and Only Indian Reservation and the Communities of Shamong and Tabernacle That Followed* (Medford, NJ: Plexus Publishing, Inc., 2005), 71.

<sup>16</sup> Petition of Stockbridge Indians to New York Assembly, 13 October 1780, CSA, Indian Papers, Series 1, Vol. 2, p 226; Love, *Samson Occom*, 360-361.

<sup>17</sup> Mahican-Stockbridge Tribe to Samson Occom, 27 August 1787, in Joanna Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan: Literature and Leadership in Eighteenth-Century Native America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 154.

<sup>18</sup> Diary of Samson Occom, 24 October 1785, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom*, 306.

expansion of white settlement. Both Brothertown and Stockbridge's efforts to police their own boundaries against encroachment by both white settlers and their overpriced or destructive commodities (such as alcohol) eventually failed. Consequently, they would go on to seek assistance from the state of New York to enforce these exclusions, a request which, unsurprisingly, came at a cost: the state agreed to help Brothertown and Stockbridge with slightly more secure borders in exchange for a reduction in their overall landholdings and increased government supervision over their activities.

Some of the conflict that emerged, particularly within the Brothertown tribe, involved differences of opinion on leadership style and doctrinal issues. Samson Occom himself became somewhat of a controversial figure. While some Stockbridge Indians had requested that Occom come preach to them in 1787, white missionary Samuel Kirkland, who had been visiting them on a temporary basis, also decided to make his permanent home in Stockbridge, New York, in 1788.<sup>19</sup> Both men regularly preached to mixed congregations of Brothertown, Stockbridge, and local white populations, and members of the two communities were divided in their preference between the two. In 1788, the two would meet for a public debate over theological considerations, which according to Occom ended with Kirkland accepting that "everyone should have full liberty to choose and act according to the light and understanding he has in his religious concerns...and so we concluded to agree to disagree."<sup>20</sup> Kirkland's acquiescence, however, belied his true opinions on Occom. In 1791, Kirkland wrote in his journal that Occom was only

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<sup>19</sup> Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom*, 377n229.

<sup>20</sup> Diary of Samson Occom, 26 July 1788, in *Ibid.*, 403.

“amenable” to himself, and claimed that Occom had been a main cause of a number of “divisions and animosities” among the Brothertown.<sup>21</sup>

More than a doctrinal controversy, the factionalism surrounding Occom had to do with decisions over how to best manage tribal landholdings in the face of massive Anglo-American expansion. Almost simultaneously with the foundation of Brothertown and Stockbridge came an explosion in colonial expansion: in twenty years, the white population in upstate New York grew from under two thousand in 1790 to over fifty-five thousand in 1810.<sup>22</sup> At least six white settlements were founded near the Brothertown and Stockbridge lands between 1786 and 1790 alone.<sup>23</sup> The general move toward westward expansion had been one of the major causes of the 1788 treaty of Fort Stanwix (see previous section) which forced the Oneida to open up large sections of their former territory to white settlement. Kirkland had helped negotiate that treaty, and in fact secured a two-mile-square portion of land for himself in the process.<sup>24</sup> Under this type of pressure, the Oneida had tried to renegotiate the terms and conditions of the Brothertown land allotment in several conferences and negotiations starting in 1785, causing tension between the two groups. Ultimately, the Brothertown remained in the original place designated for them, but the 1788 treaty meant that they were entirely surrounded by lands available to white purchasers.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the entirety of western New York

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<sup>21</sup> Diary of Samuel Kirkland 6 February 1791 and 15 March 1791, Massachusetts Historical Society, Society for Propagating the Gospel foundation, Samuel Kirkland Papers, MS M-176, folder 7.

<sup>22</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 130.

<sup>23</sup> Karim M. Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone: The Oneida Nation from the Revolution through the Era of Removal*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 84.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 213; Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> See Diary of Samson Occom, 23 Oct 1787, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom*, 382; Brad D. E. Jarvis, *The Brothertown Nation of Indians: Land Ownership and Nationalism in Early America, 1740-1840* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 125–30; Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 129.

suffered poor harvests due to weather conditions between 1785 and 1790, necessitating the governor of New York sending “relief” in the form of bushels of corn to several upstate New York tribes, including Brothertown and Stockbridge.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with this expansion of white settlement and a generally difficult economic situation, a portion of the Brothertown believed that their best chance at surviving financially involved leasing certain tracts of the Brothertown reservation to white farmers for defined periods of time. Occom and David Fowler strongly opposed this approach, but others, led by Elijah Wampy, leased out their lands anyway, backed by the particulars of the 1788 treaty, which had not only marked out Brothertown land, but also allowed leases of up to ten years’ duration to outsiders.<sup>27</sup> In the end, the conflict necessitated recourse to New York for several reasons: primarily because the Brothertown and Stockbridge had little political authority to enforce the limits on leases (by, for example, legally expelling encroachers), and also because the Natives themselves had been begun to be accused of trespassing by white settlers.<sup>28</sup> Although a 1791 act had attempted to limit the percentage of Brothertown or Stockbridge land which could be leased at any one time, the state intervened more strongly in 1795.<sup>29</sup> On March 31, 1795, the New York state legislature passed “An Act Relative to the Lands in Brothertown,” which essentially placed control over Brothertown land into the state’s hands. They designated a smaller portion of the land, around ten thousand acres or less than 40% of the original territory,

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<sup>26</sup> Act for the relief of the poor and distressed inhabitants in Clinton, Washington, Montgomery, and Albany county. 15 July 1789, NYSA, A0448-79; see also Jarvis, *The Brothertown Nation of Indians*, 130.

<sup>27</sup> William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1899), 287.

<sup>28</sup> Jarvis, *The Brothertown Nation of Indians*, 134.

<sup>29</sup> “An Act for the Relief of the Indians residing in Brother-town and Stockbridge” (1791), *Laws of the Colonial and State Governments, Relating to Indians and Indian Affairs, from 1633 to 1831* (Washington, D.C.: Thompson and Romans, 1832), 265–67.

for the exclusive use of the Brothertown, and sold the remainder of the land to white settlers.<sup>30</sup> The money from the sale, just over £14,000 pounds sterling, was “appropriated to the use of the people of this state,” and the accumulated annual interest, about £850 pounds sterling, would be doled out to Brothertown at the superintendents’ discretion.<sup>31</sup>

A three-person committee of superintendents was appointed to make yearly visits to the tribe (the cost of which was taken out of the land sale proceeds) and determine how the annuity funds would best be spent. Unsurprisingly, the funds were immediately used to assert more state control over the tribe. For example, despite multiple letters of complaint from the tribe, they were required to receive most of the annuity payments in goods, rather than money – the value of the said goods being determined by the state.<sup>32</sup> By 1805, however, the superintendents had concluded that even this form of distribution “leads to habits of idleness and dissipation,” and that if “the annuity was entirely done away with...the town would be in a better situation.” Superintendent Thomas Eddy did acknowledge that if “the usual supplies should be suddenly withheld from them, their sufferings would probably be very great.” Nevertheless, he argued, “Will not this oblige [the Brothertown] another year to be more industrious, more sober, and more careful to make suitable provision for themselves? The sufferings they might undergo would be only for one year, and it is nothing but suffering will ever bring them to be more

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<sup>30</sup> “An Act Relative to Lands in Brothertown,” (1795) *Laws of the State of New York: Passed at the Sessions of the Legislature Held in the Years 1777-1801* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers, 1887), 586–88; Jarvis, *The Brothertown Nation of Indians*, 136.

<sup>31</sup> “An Act for the relief of the Indians who are entitled to lands in Brothertown,” 4 March 1796, in *Laws of the State of New York*, 656–57. While the money was disbursed in pounds in 1796 and 1797, by 1798 it was paid out in dollars. The calculated value of annuity expenditure in dollars between 1798 and 1804 ranged between \$2000 and \$2800. See “Reports on the Brothertown Indians,” 1796, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1803, 1804, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774–1804.

<sup>32</sup> David Fowler, John Tuhy, John Skeesuck, Isaac Wobby, Peace-makers, letter to Brothertown Commissioners, 12 September 1796, NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788–1810.

industrious.”<sup>33</sup> The governor generally assented, designating the bulk of the annuity money for the payment of a schoolmaster and construction of a school, while leaving about half of the typical annuity payment to serve as “premiums” to Brothertown residents who met certain standards of industry and production.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the new acts codified that only “male Indians...above the age of twenty-one years” should convene yearly in both Brothertown and Stockbridge in order to vote on matters of governance.<sup>35</sup> There, they would also elect leaders such as town clerk and marshal, while the superintendents would appoint three “peacemakers,” men who would serve as a governing council responsible for guiding the development of the community and resolving differences. While these provisions did not represent a major departure from Brothertown and Stockbridge practices in New York before 1791, they made the continuance of male-dominated political structures more likely -- especially given that expenses accrued by men in these positions could be paid directly out of the annuity, making compliance with these directives more compelling.<sup>36</sup> The legal framework underpinning male political authority was particularly important given that Brothertown and Stockbridge would not have had to look far for examples of women in official leadership positions. For example, the 1788 Oneida constitution was signed by twenty-seven “prominent” tribal representatives, both male and female.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Report of the Superintendents to Governor Morgan Lewis, November 1805; and letter of Thomas Eddy to Henry McNeil, both Brothertown superintendents, 19 November 1805; both in NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810.

<sup>34</sup> 1808 Report of the Brothertown Superintendents, 15 February 1808, NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810.

<sup>35</sup> “An Act for the Relief of the Indians residing in Brother-town and Stockbridge” (1791) in *Laws of the Colonial and State Governments, Relating to Indians and Indian Affairs, from 1633 to 1831*, 265.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, a letter from Thomas Eddy to “Respected Friend,” 4 June 1797 mentioning the salary due to David Fowler Jr for his service as town clerk, NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810; various records of payments to the Peacemakers, Brothertown Accounts, NYSA, A0832-11, Box 3, folder 1.

<sup>37</sup> Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone*, 82.

The 1795 act, along with a 1796 act that clarified certain terms, also permitted women to be landowners but made their status more precarious than that of men. In consequence of the 1795 act, lots within Brothertown were formally assigned to individuals, and about 25% (twelve of forty-nine assigned lots) were assigned to women, who were marked as the heads of their families if they had dependents.<sup>38</sup> Female landholding was not unusual among indigenous communities, like the Mohegan, Niantic, and Narragansett tribes, who had already divided their lands into individual lots.<sup>39</sup> The 1796 act, however, did specify that children, not a wife, should inherit a man's property. If he died without heirs, the widow could remain living in a home on his property during her lifetime and maintain control of as much land as the superintendents saw fit to assign her; but upon her death the entire lot would revert to the Brothertown, who could then assign it to another individual.<sup>40</sup>

In general, the superintendents seemed to look favorably upon widows, but limited other women's ability to inherit land. For example, the Brothertown peacemakers in 1800 seemed to try to extend the law to allow a man's female siblings to inherit his land. David Adams (Brothertown) had died with no heirs but left one sister who lived in Brothertown and another who had moved away. The Peacemakers asked whether both sisters had equal rights to the land, or if the sister who lived in Brothertown should receive priority; but were informed that neither sister was entitled to the land, but that it

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<sup>38</sup> Superintendents of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians, Assignment of Lots at Brothertown, September 15, 1795, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804, 8-11.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Memorial of Lucy Cooper of Mohegan, 15 October 1806, CSA, Series 2, Vol 1, 63a; Memorial of Sarah Poquiantup and Aaron Poquiantup late of Lyme, 2 September 1808, CSA, Series 2, Vol 1, 90a; Memorial of Dolly Poquiantup of Lyme, 9 May 1809, CSA, Series 2, Vol 1, 101, 102.

<sup>40</sup> An Act for the Relief of the Indians who are entitled to lands in Brothertown, 4 March, 1796, *Laws of the State of New York*, 661.

should revert back to common property.<sup>41</sup> In a state where married women were subjected to the legal coverture of their husbands, the Brothertown superintendents, as representatives of the state of New York, seemed to want to limit female ownership of land to very specific circumstances.<sup>42</sup>

Government supervision also included a state-sponsored schoolteacher, who would live within the boundaries of Brothertown. After a lengthy search, in 1798 the committee selected John Dean, a Quaker, along with his wife. The Quakers, or Society of Friends, had been sending out missionaries to western New York for several decades, and developed a particularly close relationships with Stockbridge by the 1790s. The Brothertown Peacemakers, however, chafed at the superintendents' decision to appoint a schoolmaster for them – and given that most of the superintendents were Quakers themselves, the Brothertown suspected them of bias. In a letter of protest that they sent to the governor of New York, John Jay, they wrote that they “would not wish to be made proselytes by any people, but wish to have liberty of acting according to the dictates of [their] own conscience, both in religion and teaching [their] children.”<sup>43</sup> Although many of the Brothertown had friendly relationships with Quakers, they had worked too hard to establish religious independence to simply accept a state-appointed schoolteacher who represented a denomination external to Brothertown practice.

This stance seemed to enrage the Brothertown superintendents, who wrote Brothertown a letter brimming with righteous indignation. “We are very sorry to discover

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<sup>41</sup> Letter of Joseph Kirkland to the Brothertown Indians, 12 January 1800, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton Indian Records, 1774-1804.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph A. Ranney, “Anglicans, Merchants, and Feminists: A Comparative Study of the Evolution of Married Women’s Rights in Virginia, New York, and Wisconsin,” *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law* 6, no. 3 (2000 1999): 493–560.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Superintendents’ letter to the Brothertown Peacemakers, 10 April 1799, NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810.

in you a disposition to be jealous,” they wrote. John Dean’s appointment, they explained, had been made without any denominational bias. In a condescending turn of phrase, the superintendents explained that they themselves had often sent their children to study under schoolmasters of a different doctrinal persuasion, “and such foolish jealousies as you take up never come into our minds.” Clearly, the white superintendents had missed the heart of the Brothertown objection: the tribe itself had been founded to *escape* white missionary paternalism, and it aggrieved members of the tribe to be subjected once again to oversight from a member of a religious denomination not chosen by them. Instead, the superintendents took it as a personal affront that the Brothertown were not sufficiently grateful for the “care and industry” with which the superintendents had supposedly carried out their search.<sup>44</sup>

With the power of the state on their side, the superintendents succeeded in installing Quaker John Dean as schoolmaster in 1799. By 1800, therefore, the parameters of life in Brothertown and Stockbridge were largely set in place for the remainder of their time in New York. Both tribes had secured land that would be free from white settlement, although colonists pressed in closely around them, and participation in the local market economy would subject the Brothertown and Stockbridge to discriminatory treatment from traders and the prevalence of alcohol as a tool of colonialism. Both tribes would have a fair amount of authority in resolving internal issues, albeit through a structure of tribal governance that only gave adult men the right of suffrage and representation. Both would also be subject to New York State through various treaties and policies, which in particular limited their ability to sell and assign lots of land. The Brothertown, due to the

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<sup>44</sup> Superintendents’ letter to the Brothertown Peacemakers, 10 April 1799, NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810.

annuity system, were also under the additional oversight of the government-appointed superintendents. While indigenous leaders continued to lead religious services at both locations, white missionaries also had a strong presence in both communities, limiting in some ways the range of doctrinal and confessional expression.

### **Brothertown and Stockbridge Women in New York: relationships with missionaries**

Despite all of the changes brought by relocation and the creation of a more independent political and landowning structure (although one that quickly became subject to increased external control, as outlined above), in many ways women in the early years of Brothertown and Stockbridge maintained the same roles as they had at Moor's School (see chapter 2) and during the campaign to establish Brothertown (see chapter 4). Women continued to be praised as ideal Christians, held up as examples to the rest of their community; women also persisted in maintaining beneficial relationships with white missionaries through gendered discourse. However, the creation of Christian Indian communities also marked the advent of new roles for women, which slowly emerged throughout the early nineteenth century: indigenous women became schoolteachers and political representatives through their dual adherence to Christianity and indigenous identity. Moreover, women became crucial to the economic stability of both communities through their entrance into the local market economy and participation in "bonus" payments through the annuity system.

One of the roles that women maintained after the move to Stockbridge and Brothertown was that of exemplary Christian to both missionaries and indigenous ministers. Through their life stories, women could convince male religious leaders of the possibilities of Christian conversion for entire tribes. For example, Samuel Kirkland, the

Anglo-American missionary to Stockbridge, made several comments in his journal in the spring of 1791 regarding his disappointment with the Brothertown tribe, which had him frustrated and “worn out” with their “divisions and animosities.” In April 1791, however, an experience with a Brothertown woman seemed to change his mind. Through a letter, this unnamed woman had requested that Kirkland come converse with her on spiritual matters, because she was deathly ill and afraid of dying outside the bounds of salvation. Before hearing Kirkland’s preaching, Kirkland described the woman as “distressed” and “greatly agitated,” but the contents of his preaching seemed to calm her, and she became “composed, and said she could acquiesce to the will of God...and desired nothing more than God would be her God.” The woman died the following day, but not before (as Kirkland recorded) preaching to her friends and family gathered at her bedside, encouraging them to trust more fully in the mercy of God and to “attend to the Savior’s counsels.” “It was a truly solemn and affecting scene,” Kirkland noted. A few weeks later, he would contentedly write that his next round of preaching at Brothertown was received by a “very attentive” assembly, who “thanked [him] with apparent sincerity and warmth.” In July of that year, Kirkland would once again happily note how the example of the young woman’s death had inspired careful reflection and increased Christian practice among the Brothertown. Kirkland’s experience with the young woman, and his perception of her impact upon the time, seems to have been a major turning-point in his view of the tribe in general.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Diary of Samuel Kirkland, 15 March, 2 April, 3 April, 6 April, 17 April, and 13 July, all 1791, Massachusetts Historical Society, Society for Propagating the Gospel foundation, Samuel Kirkland papers, MS M-176, folder 7.

In fact, missionaries, government supervisors, and other visitors to Brothertown and Stockbridge generally praised women for their industry and faithfulness. In 1796, Congregational ministers Jeremy Belknap and Jedidiah Morse were sent by the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge to visit the Oneida, Stockbridge, and Brothertown and make a report on their progress in Christianity.<sup>46</sup> They reported that at Stockbridge, “it is computed that about two-thirds of the men and nine-tenths of the women are industrious.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, they noted that twenty-five of the thirty official church members at Stockbridge (those who had been admitted for acceptance, a much smaller number than the regular attendees) were women – and of the five men, two had been suspended for drunkenness!<sup>48</sup> Kirkland himself verified the holiness of at least one Stockbridge woman, once again through a conversation on her deathbed: “As she had for many years been a professor of the Christian religion,” he wrote in his diary in 1787, “she gave satisfactory evidence of an interest in the merits of the redeemer, and great submission to the divine.”<sup>49</sup> Quaker missionary Joseph Clark also had good things to say about the way that Christianity was practiced in Stockbridge, especially by the women. “Being frequently in company with the Stockbridge Indians, they are superior — especially the women — to many under our name who make a high profession of religion,” he wrote.<sup>50</sup> That same year, when Hendrick Aupaumut wrote a letter to the Society of Friends detailing Stockbridge acceptance of Christianity, he only gave one

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<sup>46</sup> Dean R. Snow et al., *In Mohawk Country: Early Narratives about a Native People* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 347.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Belknap and Jedidiah Morse, *Report on the Oneida, Stockbridge, and Brotherton [Sic] Indians, 1796*, Indian Notes and Monographs 54 (New York: Museum of the American Indian, 1955), 21.

<sup>48</sup> Belknap and Morse, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Diary of Samuel Kirkland, 24 November 1787, Massachusetts Historical Society, Society for Propagating the Gospel foundation, MS M-176, folder 6.

<sup>50</sup> Diary of Joseph Clark, 2 November 1797, in Joseph Clark, *Joseph Clark: Travels Among the Indians: 1797*, ed. Charles Ingerman (Doylestown, PA: Quixott Press, 1968), 16–17.

specific example of conversion, that of an elderly widow. “She is now crying after Jesus, whom she told me, she loves with her whole heart,” he wrote.<sup>51</sup> Positive reports on Brothertown were not quite so gendered. For example, the Brothertown commissioners included both men and women in a letter encouraging them to “persevere in a steady conduct, and by setting examples of sobriety and industry induce others to join them.”<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, negative reports focused mainly on indigenous men, grounding their criticisms in the long-held stereotype of Native men. “Too many of them are still idle and given to bad habits,” wrote the Brothertown superintendents in 1797.<sup>53</sup>

Just as many of the female indigenous students had done at Moor’s school (see chapter 2), the women of Brothertown and Stockbridge specifically cultivated connections with missionaries and ministers in order to support or create this image of themselves as Christian Indian women. In doing so, they sometimes acted contrary to the inclinations of male leaders, both indigenous and Euro-American. Brothertown and Stockbridge women’s relationship with Quaker missionaries, in particular, provides the clearest example of gendered differences in indigenous-missionary interactions, and demonstrates the ways that relationships established by women helped expand female autonomy and strengthen Christian Indian communities.

Quaker missionaries had begun expanding into upstate New York in the late eighteenth century, and became a more frequent presence in Brothertown and Stockbridge in the 1790s. The Brothertown protests surrounding the appointment of

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<sup>51</sup> Hendrick Aupamut to Henry Simmons Sr, 7 November 1797, HC-HSL, Vol. 1, 54.

<sup>52</sup> Edmund Prior and Thomas Eddy, Brothertown Superintendents, to the Brothertown Indians, 2 June 1796, New York State Archives, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810.

<sup>53</sup> 1797 Report of the Brothertown Superintendents, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804.

Quaker John Dean as schoolmaster made it clear that Brothertown male leaders, who were generally associated with the Presbyterian church due to Samson Occom's ordination in that denomination, were not comfortable with the increased Quaker presence. Given the levels of Quaker influence in New York state politics, however – even the Brothertown Superintendents' reports were dated according to the Quaker style, as “9<sup>th</sup> month” or “12<sup>th</sup> month” instead of September or December -- John Dean's appointment was difficult to avoid.

For their part, Quaker missionaries initially intended on focusing almost exclusively on men. Sometimes they addressed their communication specifically to Native men, as when the Philadelphia Committee of Indian Institutions wrote to the Six Nations: “Brothers, do you desire to learn some of our useful trades, such as blacksmiths, millwrights, wheelwrights, and carpenters, that you may build houses, and mills, and do other necessary things to make your lives more comfortable?”<sup>54</sup> At other times, they urged New York tribes to accept missionary assistance in missives that were implicitly directed toward men: “You already know that game is becoming scarce, and have reason to expect that in a few years more it will be gone, what then will you do to feed and clothe yourselves?” they asked. Although this letter was not addressed specifically to “brothers” or men, the next clause of the letter made it clear that the letter-writers envisioned a male audience: “...what then will you do to feed and clothe yourselves, your wives, and children?”<sup>55</sup> The Quakers' answer to this question was simple: they invited the Six Nations, as well as Stockbridge, to send some “young men and boys” to live

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<sup>54</sup> Circulating letter from the Committee of the Indian Institution appointed by the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia to the Six Nations of Indians, 5 January 1796, HC-HSL, Vol. 1, 47.

<sup>55</sup> Timothy Pickering to Chiefs and Warriors of the Six Nations, 15 February 1796, HC-HSL, Vol. 1, 22.

among the Quakers and learn “the most useful practices of the white people.”<sup>56</sup> Like Eleazar Wheelock, the Quakers believed that education of Indian boys was the key to indigenous progress in white civilization.

A year later, however, the Quaker program had shifted to focus on education of girls rather than boys. Joseph Clark, a missionary who regularly traveled in the area, was sent by the Philadelphia meeting to upstate New York in the fall of 1797 to recruit three Stockbridge girls, two Tuscarora girls, and two Oneida girls for the Quaker educational plans in Pennsylvania.<sup>57</sup> The Oneida, however, declined to participate. Instead, they requested that more missionary teachers be sent to Oneida territory, believing that educating their children in their home communities would “would better preserve [Oneida children’s] morals and be of greater utility among the Indians.”<sup>58</sup> In the end, six girls – four from Stockbridge and two Tuscarora -- traveled with Quaker missionary Joseph Clark from upstate New York to Pennsylvania, where they would live for several years. Two of the Stockbridge girls, Mary Peters and Margery Hendrick, were closely related to Stockbridge leadership: Mary was most likely the daughter of Peter Pohquonnoppeet, a pillar of the Stockbridge church often known as “Good Peter,” and Margery Hendrick was probably related to Hendrick Aupamut, one of the principal sachems.

What caused the Quakers to focus on educating girls rather than boys? As historian Kallie Kosc has pointed out in her doctoral dissertation, Stockbridge women

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<sup>56</sup> Timothy Pickering to Chiefs and Warriors of the Six Nations, 15 February 1796, HC-HSL, Vol. 1, 23.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Niemi, “The Interconnected Lives of Stockbridge Indians Mary (Peters) Doxtater and Peter Pohquonnoppeet,” ed. Shirley Dunn, *New York State Museum Bulletin*, no. 511 (2009): 146.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Dawn Peterson, *Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2017), 66.

had taken it upon themselves to establish a relationship with Quaker women a year before the educational plan for educating girls was put in place.<sup>59</sup> Six Quaker missionaries spent that summer in upstate New York, traveling between Brothertown, Stockbridge, Oneida, and Tuscarora territory. During that time, both Brothertown and Stockbridge women sent letters back to Philadelphia. Lornhamah Crosley (Brothertown), along with her oldest daughter Grace, sent letters to the wife and daughters of missionary Joshua Evans.<sup>60</sup> Although two years later, the men of Brothertown would object to having a Quaker schoolteacher stationed in their town, Lornhamah wrote that she believed that Joshua had been “sent by the hand of God to do good to my Nation the Indians.” She was writing to Joshua’s wife because she viewed Joshua as “a Father in Israel” and therefore she believed that his wife must be a mother – a woman who could help gather the “lost sheep in Israel” into God’s fold.<sup>61</sup>

A few months later, Lydia (Quinney) Hendrick also sent a letter to Philadelphia. While her husband, Hendrick Aupaumut, sent a letter on the same day addressed to the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, at that time led by John Eliot, Lydia Hendrick sent her letter to John Elliot’s wife Margaret.<sup>62</sup> She informed Margaret, who she called her “sister in the Lord,” that she was one of ten women in Stockbridge who had a particular love for Quaker people. Moreover, she added that she desired to “instruct her six children, two

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<sup>59</sup> See Kallie M Kosc, “Daughters of the Nation: Stockbridge Mohican Women, Education, and Citizenship in Early America, 1790-1840” (Doctoral Dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2019), particularly chapter 3. I am indebted to Dr. Kosc for sharing a copy of her dissertation with me shortly after her defense.

<sup>60</sup> Biographical information on Lornhamah and Grace Crosely from Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 339.

<sup>61</sup> Lornhamah Crosby to Joshua Evans’ wife [Ann], 13 July 1796, Henry Simmons Letterbook, Vol 1, 44.

<sup>62</sup> See Kosc, “Daughters of the Nation: Stockbridge Mohican Women, Education, and Citizenship in Early America, 1790-1840,” 74.

girls and four boys...in the fear of the Lord.”<sup>63</sup> While both Lydia and Lornhamah used formal language in their letters – even echoing the Quaker usage of thee and thou, a more informal letter from Grace Crosley, twenty years old, made more plain the women’s purpose in writing (and perhaps indicates that Grace wrote the letter somewhat reluctantly at her mother’s bidding). “Me thinks [your father] looks like one of the good old saints,” she wrote to Joshua Evans’ daughters Margaret and Priscilla, but after this picturesque opening, she seemed to run out of words. “As I never have had any acquaintance with either of you, I can’t express myself, but I hope that if it is the will of the all-wise being, it might be for some end,” she concluded.<sup>64</sup> Later events would make it clear that the end, or purpose, of these letters was to establish a relationship with Quaker women that might eventually benefit Stockbridge and Brothertown women.

In Philadelphia, the Quaker women received these letters warmly, and wrote back to the “Indian women” of upstate New York in the fall of 1796. The letter, written by Hannah West, Sarah Newtown, Rachel Hunt, and Rachel Valentine – all on the Committee of Women Friends of Chester, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – used specifically gendered language to describe what they perceived as the benefits of Christianity to indigenous women. “Sisters, Christianity hath taught our Brethren to be tender towards their women and not to oppress them...wherefore we think it would tend greatly to the happiness of your Nation, to learn Christianity.” Along with the letter, they sent items designed to support domestic life and education: fabric woven by the Quakers themselves, and a small stove to keep the Stockbridge schoolhouse warm. The letter, therefore, both acknowledged the material needs of the Native women and offered them

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<sup>63</sup> Lydia Hendrick to Margaret Elliot, 8 September 1796, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 42-43.

<sup>64</sup> Grace Crosley to Priscilla and Margaret Evans, 3 July 1796, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 45.

emotional support. The communication between Brothertown and Stockbridge women and Quaker women broadened and expanded in 1797, with a group of twelve Stockbridge women reaching out to Quaker women from New York, specifically the wives of government-appointed Stockbridge overseers Thomas Eddy, Thomas Titus, and Gideon Seaman.<sup>65</sup> Lorahamah Crosely wrote another letter to Joshua Evans' wife, this time speaking for the male head of her household by stating that "my husband sends his love to your husband and the rest of your family," and generally expressing gratitude for Quaker assistance in Brothertown.<sup>66</sup> Other letters from Stockbridge women followed a similar theme: offering thanks for Quaker support and conveying hope for continued Quaker presence in the region.<sup>67</sup> Stockbridge men did occasionally write letters as well, but at a lower rate and following more formal leadership roles: most existing male-authored letters were written by sachem Hendrick Aupamut. Brothertown men are notably absent from the Quaker literary record, although that is perhaps unsurprising given their 1799 opposition to a Quaker schoolteacher.

When news arrived that the Quakers were willing to provide education for Stockbridge girls, therefore, the Stockbridge women knew just who to thank for the decision. On November 8, 1797, four Stockbridge women wrote to the Chester Committee of Women Friends, acknowledging and accepting the plan. "We believe it is [the] Good Spirit that puts it into your hearts to show this great favor to us. We, therefore, heartily accept your proposals and willingly send our daughters unto you," they wrote.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Josy [Joseph] et al to Hannah Eddy, Martha Titus, Elizabeth Seaman, and our other sisters of the people called Quakers of the State of New York, 24 July 1797, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 56.

<sup>66</sup> Lorahamah Crosely to Joshua Evans' wife [Ann], 8 September 1797, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 62-64.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Catherine Quackmut to Rebecca Roberts, 9 September 1797, and a more expressive letter from Grace Crosely to "a Friend," 9 October 1797, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 55, 69.

<sup>68</sup> Eve Knuhkaunmuw et al to Hannah West et al, 8 November 1797, HC-HSL, Vol 1., 74.

Elizabeth Joseph, one of the signers of that letter, sent a separate missive to Henry Simmons confirming that despite her daughter's nervousness about leaving home, Elizabeth was "cheerfully willing that [her daughter] should go with these good friends to their homes."<sup>69</sup> The arrangement to send Stockbridge girls instead of boys to receive training in Anglo-American domesticity seems to have been the decision of both Quaker and Stockbridge women. The four Stockbridge girls would live with Quaker families in Pennsylvania for around three years before returning home. As we will see, at least one, Mary Peters, made a major impact on her tribe's economic autonomy and future development upon her return.

Overall, therefore, Stockbridge and Brothertown women continued their roles as exemplary Christians whose lives provided fodder for missionary testimonies. Through their stories of greater conversion and repentance – although rarely direct conversions from non-Christian traditions to Christianity at this point – they often served as representatives of their entire tribe to the outside world. But Stockbridge and Brothertown women also took firm control over their own representation and positionality by establishing communication with Quaker women, sometimes also bypassing male authority. This communication helped the Stockbridge and Brothertown women secure material goods, receive support and commiseration from white women, and prepare the way for the education of some of their daughters. Moreover, Brothertown and Stockbridge women parlayed their reputations as good Christian women, as well as their connections with missionaries, into leadership positions that also reflected indigenous traditions. Specifically, women served as schoolteachers, spiritual leaders,

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<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Joseph to Henry Simmons, 8 November 1797, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 66.

and financial supporters of their tribes – all variations of positions that women had occupied in coastal New England and Mohican cultures in previous centuries, but now reflecting Christian Indian women’s unique positionality in the early national period.

### **Stockbridge and Brothertown Women in New York: leadership roles**

Women not only served as models of Christianity in textual representations of indigenous people: they also guided and supported their communities in Christian practice. Occasionally, women spoke at tribal religious services. Missionary John Sergeant reported, for example, that a 1793 Sunday service in Brothertown included “four speakers or exhorters, the last of whom was a woman.”<sup>70</sup> A Quaker missionary, Christopher Healy, also remembered a Brothertown woman, Grace Tocus, speaking during a religious service when he visited the tribe in 1820. Her words, both “lively and pertinent,” had stayed with Healy for several decades, from his initial visit in to a joyful reunion with Tocus in 1842.<sup>71</sup> Beyond preaching at large gatherings, evidence shows that back in New England, indigenous women had played a crucial role in maintaining Christian Indian congregations: leading hymn singing, accompanying missionaries, and participating in spiritual conversations.<sup>72</sup> They would continue to hold this role within Brothertown. Samson Occom’s diary indicates that services were regularly held at widow Esther Fowler’s house in Brothertown on Thursday evenings. Throughout the late summer and fall of 1787, Occom recorded that he preached at Esther Fowler’s home

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 311.

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Healy, *Memoir of Christopher Healy, Principally Taken from His Own Memoranda* ([No location given]: Friends’ Book Store, 1886), 103, 181.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, entries in the diary of Joseph Johnson, 4 December 1772 and 15 December 1772, in Laura J Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 156; as well as entries in the diary of Samson Occom, 1 January 1774, 24 April 1785, 18 August 1785, 24 October 1785, 6 November 1785, Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 279, 293, 297, 306, 308.

nearly every week, except for the second Thursday of the month when he preached at David Fowler's instead. Sunday services during this same time period often included a larger congregation of Natives from both Stockbridge and Brothertown, as well as white people on occasion. The gatherings at Esther Fowler's, in contrast, were usually smaller, but Occom often noted that the attendees were particularly devoted to hearing his message and listened carefully. A woman's home, it seems, became the place where Brothertown members could gather to strengthen their own sense of community and identity without any outside pressure or intrusion.

At Stockbridge, women regularly gathered together to offer each other support in spiritual matters. A letter signed by a group of twelve Stockbridge women in 1797 informed the Quaker women of Pennsylvania that they held "religious services twice in every week to seek after the ways of the good Spirit, and have at times been comforted by him who searcheth all the hearts."<sup>73</sup> A decade or so later, women in both Brothertown and Stockbridge would establish women's groups for mutual support and character formation. In Brothertown, the Female Moral Society was founded in 1808, the same year as the Male Moral Society; a Female Cent Society was founded in Stockbridge in 1817 for the purpose of promoting "the progress of science & the useful arts of reading, spinning, knitting, sewing, industry and good morals."<sup>74</sup> Although the Male Moral Society was larger than the Female one in Brothertown, the men found themselves often having to "disown" members for drunkenness or address issues of "misbehavior," whereas the women generally reported that "love and unity" prevailed in their meetings.

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<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Josy [Joseph] et al to Hannah Eddy, Martha Titus, Elizabeth Seaman, and our other sisters of the people called Quakers of the State of New York, 24 July 1797, HC-HSL, Vol 1, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Foundation of the Female Cent Society, 4 December 1817, Indiana State Archives [hereafter ISA], Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

Moreover, the tribe's attorney Thomas Dean, the son of white schoolteacher John Dean, also joined the male society, regularly attended the meetings, and often held leadership positions within the group. Although Thomas Dean had a wife and two daughters, they seem not to have been involved with the Female Moral Society in Brothertown. Members of both the Female and Male Moral Societies paid dues and sometimes loaned money out to members in need of assistance, but on one occasion three Brothertown men were forced to turn to the Female Society to ask for a small loan (which they received).<sup>75</sup> Overall, the Female Moral Society seemed to be a more exclusively indigenous space, with less conflict and more financial stability than the Male Society.

Stockbridge and Brothertown women also had an impact on education within their tribes, in both formal and informal venues. In many ways, women's interest in education was a continuation of earlier practices. During colonial times, women and girls of coastal New England tribes often attended missionary schools at a higher rate than boys and men – reflective both of their typical labor practices that kept women closer to home, as well as women's traditional roles as cultural go-betweens and mediators. For example, Joseph Fish, a missionary stationed among the Pequots of Stonington, noted in 1769 that his mission site included “a large school, some 30 scholars” among whom were married women, at least one widow, and many female adolescents.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps for this reason, the tribe requested that the New England Company, which was about to sponsor

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<sup>75</sup> Records of the Female Moral Society and the Male Moral Society, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 4 & 5.

<sup>76</sup> Diary of Joseph Fish, 30 January 1769, in Joseph Fish, *Old Light on Separate Ways: The Narragansett Diary of Joseph Fish, 1765-1776*, ed. Cheryl L. Simmons and William Scranton Simmons (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1982), 55.

an indigenous schoolteacher for Stonington, send an indigenous woman; but the New England Company refused.<sup>77</sup>

A woman's membership in a Christian Indian community, however, seemed to change Anglo-American men's perspectives: for the first time, they became willing to pay indigenous women for teaching school. In 1797, the state-appointed overseers for the Brothertown reported that a "sober young Indian woman" had taught school over the summer – marking the first time that an indigenous woman was officially recognized by the state government as a schoolteacher.<sup>78</sup> Nineteenth-century historian William DeLoss Love identified this woman as Hannah (Garrett) Fowler, an alumna of Moor's and the wife of Brothertown leader David Fowler; but she would have been fifty years old in 1797, and the mother of nine children, making her unlikely to be identified as young. More probably, the schoolteacher was David and Hannah's daughter, also named Hannah Fowler, who was 29 in 1797 and would be married a few years later.<sup>79</sup> Given the chaotic environment of the 1770s and early 1780s, when the daughter Hannah Fowler would have been a young girl – during which period the Fowler family moved several times, from Oneida to Stockbridge to Brothertown – it seems likely that Hannah was educated at home by her parents. Nevertheless, she demonstrated enough competence as a schoolteacher that the Brothertown superintendents were content to leave her in place while they searched for a "more qualified" schoolmaster. Around 1813, Grace Tocus of Brothertown also taught school at a second schoolhouse within the town.<sup>80</sup> A missionary

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<sup>77</sup> Hilary E Wyss, "Writing Back to Wheelock: One Young Woman's Response to Colonial Christianity," in *Early Native Literacies in New England*, by Hilary E Wyss and Kristina Bross (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>78</sup> 1797 Report of the Brothertown Superintendents, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 309, 345.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid* 345.

report published by the Scottish Society for the Propagation of Faith in 1833 commented that three Stockbridge women had taught school at some point in the past decades.<sup>81</sup> At least one of those women must have been Electa Quinney, daughter of prominent Stockbridge leader John Quinney, who taught school in Stockbridge in 1822, after having attended both the Clinton Female Seminary in a neighboring town in New York as well as a Quaker boarding school on Long Island.<sup>82</sup> While it is unclear if Hannah Fowler or Grace Tocus had been paid for their services teaching school, an 1829 letter from a missionary confirmed that Quinney was paid out of the “public funds of the Indians,” marking an additional level of recognitions from external authorities.<sup>83</sup> Another of the three teachers might have been Mary Doxtator, who after her return from living with a Quaker family outside Pennsylvania, began receiving missionary funding to help her open a spinning and weaving school for Stockbridge women around 1810 (to be discussed in more depth later).<sup>84</sup>

Education in reading, writing, and European-style domestic arts could, of course, be a double-edged sword for indigenous people. In eighteenth-century missionary schools, students sometimes acquired the tools needed to engage with written documents at the cost of their own cultural heritage and identity – a type of cultural assimilation that was even more violently imposed in the infamous boarding schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Scattered reports from male indigenous schoolteachers, however,

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<sup>81</sup> Rev. Cutting Marsh, First Scottish Report for 1833 in “Documents Relating to the Stockbridge Mission,” *Collections - State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, vol. 15 (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, 1900), 80.

<sup>82</sup> Karyn Saemann, *Electa Quinney, Stockbridge Teacher* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2014), 19.

<sup>83</sup> Augustus Ambler to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 23 March 1829, in *Collections - State Historical Society of Wisconsin*, 15:47.

<sup>84</sup> David Butler to Governor John Tayler, 17 March 1818, NL, Ayer MS 127; Kosciuszko, “Daughters of the Nation: Stockbridge Mohican Women, Education, and Citizenship in Early America, 1790-1840,” 140.

indicate that native-run schools developed a certain style of teaching that reflected indigenous culture to a greater degree. Samson Occom, for example, used an alphabet made out of wood to help his Montauk and Mohegan-Pequot students develop the ability to visually differentiate between letters, and at least occasionally spoke in Mohegan to students.<sup>85</sup> Others, like Joseph Johnson and David Fowler, held singing schools that reflected traditional Algonkian enthusiasm for group singing.

Less information has survived about female schoolteachers' methods. An late nineteenth-century interview with one of Electa Quinney's nephews, however, included one detail that separated her classroom from indigenous children's experiences in other schools: "It was very seldom that she whipped us," he reminisced.<sup>86</sup> Indigenous cultures of New England avoided using corporal punishment when disciplining children, but it was a common feature of Anglo-American parenting.<sup>87</sup> By rarely whipping her students, Quinney situated herself in a long tradition of indigenous perspectives on childrearing.

Moreover, in serving as schoolteachers, women sometimes succeeded where Native men had failed. Hannah Fowler replaced Elijah Wampy (Brothertown) as schoolteacher because he had lapsed into frequent drunkenness and was setting a poor example for his students. Perhaps with Wampy's experiences in mind, ministers and visitors to the Brothertown and Stockbridge tribes Jeremy Belknap and Jedidiah Morse argued that young indigenous men should be educated in their hometowns, rather than sent to Anglo-American schools. They believed that the process of moving back and forth

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<sup>85</sup> Samson Occom, "Autobiographical Narrative: Second Draft (September 17, 1768)" in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom*, 56.

<sup>86</sup> H. Severin, "The First Wisconsin Teacher," *Wisconsin Journal of Education* 19, no. 1 (1889): 494.

<sup>87</sup> See Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 34–35; R. Todd Romero, *Making War and Minting Christians: Masculinity, Religion, and Colonialism in Early New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), chapter 8.

between Anglo-American towns and indigenous lands created an insurmountable level of culture shock: “The most bitter mortification...has been the fate of several Indians who have had the opportunity of enjoying an English or French education and have returned to their native country. Such persons must either entirely renounce their acquired habits and resume their savage life, or, if they live among their countrymen, then must be despised, and their death will be unlamented,” they concluded.<sup>88</sup> Belknap and Morse’s dolorous perspective, however, did not incorporate the experiences of women like Mary Doxtator or Electa Quinney, both of whom moved away from their home communities to receive training in Anglo-American domestic skills and education, and then were able to return to Stockbridge and successfully use the knowledge they had gained to help improve opportunities within their own tribe. Women, it seems, were able to overcome the challenges of cultural adaptation in ways that indigenous men were not. Women’s engagement with education might also help explain why in 1818, a Brothertown wife was able to sign her name to a legal document, while her husband had to sign with an “X.”<sup>89</sup> Overall, women like Fowler, Tocus, Doxtator, and Quinney were able to draw upon Anglo-American and Christian resources – like English literacy skills and missionary donations – in a way that also reflected Native women’s longstanding role as revered sources of authority.

Mary Doxtator’s spinning school connects with another major theme in Brothertown and Stockbridge women’s roles during the New York period: the importance of Native women’s financial contributions to the economic well-being of

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<sup>88</sup> Belknap and Morse, *Report on the Oneida, Stockbridge, and Brotherton [Sic] Indians, 1796*, 35–36.

<sup>89</sup> Indenture for transfer of land from Thomas and Deborah Isaacs to the Brothertown tribe, 28 September 1818, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

their tribes. In 1795, a group of Stockbridge leaders described a crisis caused by the declining productivity of hunting due to settler colonialism: they were no longer able to acquire enough material to clothe themselves in the traditional Native manner, but they also lacked the knowledge to weave and construct their own cloth according to Anglo-American norms. In consequence, they were “forced to seek some articles of clothing among the traders; and the traders generally set up great price on their goods.” Moreover, interacting with white traders put indigenous people at risk of being cheated, extorted, or robbed.<sup>90</sup> A few years later, in 1813, Mary Doxtator opened her spinning school and helped other native women substantially increase their production of cloth. Within two years, she was instructing nearly sixty women, helping to free the Stockbridge tribe from their dependence on traders.<sup>91</sup> Brothertown women also developed their own systems of spinning and producing cloth: in 1826, for example, thirty Brothertown women produced over 2,000 yards of material!<sup>92</sup> As historian Dawn Peterson argues, native women’s ability to weave their own cloth thus helped create more economic autonomy for their tribes and move away from reliance on exploitative trading systems.<sup>93</sup>

The expansion of Brothertown and Stockbridge women’s cloth production occurred through a number of different mechanisms. Mary Doxtator’s spinning school was supported by missionary contributions, especially from the Quakers, and donations from local white congregations. The project was initially made possible by a donation of

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<sup>90</sup> Hendrick Aupaumut et al to the Indian Meeting of the Friends’ Missionary Society, 19 November 1795, in Samuel Lorenzo Knapp, *The Life of Thomas Eddy* (London: Fry, 1836), 79.

<sup>91</sup> Certificate of Mary Peters by John Sergeant, 19 September 1815, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

<sup>92</sup> Records of Annuity Payments, 1826, NYSA, A0832-77, Box 3, folder 1.

<sup>93</sup> Dawn Peterson, *Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 69.

twelve spinning wheels and hundreds of pounds of unspun flax and wool from the Quakers.<sup>94</sup> A few years later, local churches would begin to offer donations in support of the school; Doxtator's reputation as an outstanding Christian woman was an essential part of gathering these donations. As one circular letter, signed by several members of the Presbyterian church in the white settlement of Onondaga Hollow, New York, stated: Those who "feel disposed to give articles that may be useful in [instruction in domestic arts]...may commit this bounty into the hands of Mary with the most entire confidence that it will be faithfully appropriated according to their wishes."<sup>95</sup> Doxtator's connections with missionary groups and Christian identity helped her gather the material goods necessary to promote Stockbridge's economic independence.

Influence over white settlers, however, was not the only way that indigenous women worked to establish weaving as a fundamental means of self-support: they also used traditional kinship networks to pass along knowledge. For example, Nancy Dick, a Brothertown woman, was a prodigious weaver, producing over 100 yards of material every two months. While she often wove simple woolen cloth, she also made items that required a higher skill level: twilled material, blue and white checked fabric, and plaid blankets – characteristic of fabric production in middle-class Anglo-American New England.<sup>96</sup> The rest of the women in the Dick family frequently followed in Nancy's footsteps: when Nancy produced dyed wool blankets, so did her sister-in-law Hannah and

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<sup>94</sup> Certificate of Mary Peters by John Sergeant, 19 September 1815, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 9.

<sup>95</sup> Circular Letter of Rev James H. Mills et al, 18 January 1821, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>96</sup> Marla R. Miller, *The Needle's Eye: Women and Work in the Age of Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 39–42.

her niece Elizabeth.<sup>97</sup> In this arena, the intersection of dual identities proved crucial: by linking government economic structures with the support of other indigenous women and traditional kinship networks, women increased their earning potential and economic self-sufficiency. In an analysis of southern groups like the Creek, Cherokee, and Choctaw, historian James Taylor Carson arrived at a similar conclusion about southern Native women's adoption of spinning and weaving: "Keeping the scope of economic innovations within the boundaries of their traditionally accepted gender roles as farmers," he argued, allowed women to "adapt but not abandon the cultures that gave their lives meaning."<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, Brothertown women's production of cloth helped them take full advantage of New York's patronizing system of distributing the annuity payments. While final discretion of annuity disbursement still rested with the state-appointment Brothertown Superintendents, and generally prioritized the desires of the white policymakers, around 1822 the state tried instituting a "premium" system that rewarded Brothertown members with cash payments for achieving a certain level of what the government deemed "civilization." The premium system incorporated a motley collection of activities implicated in agriculture and the production of domestic goods. Men were typically paid for putting up fences and caring for large livestock, while women were paid for making cloth and collecting goose feathers. Female landowners could also be paid for having fences built on their lots, although the Brothertown Superintendents

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<sup>97</sup> Entry documentation submitted by the Indian Commissioner for annuities paid to the Indians, 1796-1925, NYSA, A0832-77, Box 3, folders 3-7.

<sup>98</sup> James Taylor Carson, "Dollars Never Fail to Melt Their Hearts: Native Women and the Market Revolution," in *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, by Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 28.

assumed that the women did not put up these fences themselves.<sup>99</sup> Within these parameters, women participated in the program at a higher rate, earning more money overall as well as more money per person, primarily for the production of cloth. In a one-year period, for example, 46 women received at least one such bonus payment from the annuity account, earning \$243.04 total, a significantly larger amount than the \$171.17 that 36 men had earned that year.<sup>100</sup> While specific records of payments to individuals were only available for 1826, the 1824 Superintendents' report noted that women had earned \$213.38 in 1824, and around \$163.50 the year before.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, women were often paid individually by the state, even if they were married. Notably, in at least two cases, the money due for a married couple's care for livestock ("*they* have nine sheep which *they* own & keep") was included in the direct payment to the wife.<sup>102</sup> At a time when New York State was only beginning to debate married women's ability to control their own earnings, indigenous women's ability to directly receive payments from the

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<sup>99</sup> The premium certificates followed a certain formula: "**This may certify that** [name of Brothertown tribal member] [has made or has got] [item] **for which [he or she] is entitled to a premium of** [amount]." When a premium for a fence was paid to a man, the certificate would read, for example, "This may certify that Laton Dick has made 73 rods of new fence, for which he is entitled to a premium of \$6.80." For a woman, the certificate would read "This may certify that Betsy Wiggins has got 15 rods of new fence made on her lot, for which she is entitled to a premium of \$0.90." The different phrasing implies that men built fences, while women hired men to build fences, but the premium per rod of fence remained the same in either case: 6¢ per rod. See Record of Annuity Payments, 1826, NYSA, Box 3, folder 4. It should be noted that fence-building, in the opinions of many coastal indigenous groups, marked a definite cultural shift in land usage from traditionally Native approaches to Anglo-American legal constructs, and was resisted by the Mohegans, Mashpee, Narragansetts, and Chappaquiddicks until well into the nineteenth century. See Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History*, 12-13.

<sup>100</sup> Data from 1826, Entry documentation submitted by the Indian Commissioner for annuities paid to the Indians, 1796-1925, NYSA, A0832-77, Box 3, folders 3-7.

<sup>101</sup> 1824 Superintendents' Report, 1 January 1825, New York State Archives, A1823 Petitions, Correspondence, and reports relating to Indians, 1783-1831.

<sup>102</sup> Certificate of annuity payment to Sarah Ann Dick, 30 December 1826, NYSA, A0832-77, Box 3, folders 3-5.

state is remarkable.<sup>103</sup> Within the new bonus system, women could independently and reliably earn cash payments – and they did so at a higher rate than men.

Furthermore, women's financial assets meant they became essential lenders to both men and women of their tribes. From 1797 until 1839, the Brothertown kept a record of the cases heard by their internal court, which mostly mandated repayments of debts and settled disputes between members of the tribe. Especially in the early years, women were active participants in this court: from 1800 until 1805, they actually made up the majority of plaintiffs in cases, but through 1810 their presence in the court remained at about the same level as men. In fact, one Penelope Paul filed the court's very first case, regarding Isaac Waukus's debt to her of one pound, twelve shillings, and sixpence. A few months later, Sarah Simon took Samuel Adams to court because he had failed to pay her rent for using her land. The court ordered that Adams pay Simon three bushels of wheat, plus court fees. Women sued men, married couples, and other women for payment of debts. Women were also frequently ordered to pay back loans that they themselves had incurred. In short, women were active members in the economic world of the Brothertown community, engaging in both making and extending loans to others on a regular basis.<sup>104</sup> The participation of Brothertown women in both market production and financial loans harkened back to earlier days of coastal Algonquian interactions with

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<sup>103</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich also observed that the diaries of unmarried women in the late colonial period tended to include information about their earnings from the sale of cloth, but these entries typically disappeared after marriage. See Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 199.

<sup>104</sup> Brothertown Court Record Book, 1797-1839, Brothertown Nation Collection (currently held by the Oneida Cultural Center at Green Bay).

white traders, when women were primarily responsible for negotiating the sale of the furs, fish, meat, and skins collected by the men of the tribe.<sup>105</sup>

Overall, the women of Brothertown and Stockbridge were able to create roles for themselves that incorporated tribal traditions and perspectives dating back centuries, while also drawing upon new resources and rhetoric available to them in the newly-emergent United States. Native women's embrace of Christian lifestyles earned validation from both Native and white ministers and allowed them to continue to serve as moral guides for their tribes. Their participation in Christian Indian communities as well as external educational opportunities also made them candidates for teaching school, earning themselves formal government recognition in the process. And finally, Stockbridge and Brothertown women's collaboration in the production of cloth – depending both on missionary support and kinship connections – helped their tribes find greater economic stability while also increasing individual women's wealth.

### **Stockbridge and Brothertown Women in New York: Limitations**

Despite women's achievements in certain realms, life was not always easy for them. Governmental policies imposed on Brothertown and Stockbridge tended to prioritize male landholding and male political representation. Most importantly, Native women's voices were ignored or overruled in two important decisions impacting the future of Brothertown and Stockbridge. In Brothertown, men and women clashed over the racial definition of their tribe, particularly whether or not Native women who married men of African descent should be entitled to land in Brothertown. Despite women's

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<sup>105</sup> Robert S. Grumet, "Sunksquaws, Shamans, and Tradeswomen: Middle Atlantic Coastal Algonkian Women During the 17th and 18th Centuries," in *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives*, by Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock (New York: Praeger, 1980), 56.

objections, the policy remained in place. In Stockbridge, debate centered around the possibility of moving further west, from New York to Indiana or Wisconsin. A sizeable number of women opposed the move but failed to halt the plans: the tribe moved to Wisconsin starting in 1822.

Official policies in both Brothertown and Stockbridge – written and ratified by the New York State Assembly – designated adult male enfranchisement as the norm. Men over the age of twenty-one were required to gather yearly to vote on tribal leadership and make decisions over the future of the tribe, and women’s role in this process was not specified. Women were never elected as peacemakers, clerks, or any of the other elected positions.<sup>106</sup> As mentioned earlier, this strict exclusion of women from official leadership positions, while it seems to have been in place in Brothertown and Stockbridge even before the state’s intervention, differed from the practices of both neighboring tribes and some of the coastal New England tribes. Oneida women had signed the 1788 Oneida constitution in a leadership capacity.<sup>107</sup> And back in Connecticut and Rhode Island, Native women who had remained in their coastal hometowns seemed to preserve stronger political representation and maintained more of their ancestral traditions. As historian Daniel Mandell noted, visitors to the Narragansetts and Mashpees in the 1820s were surprised by the fact that women in the tribe voted, held authority, and controlled the majority of agricultural production.<sup>108</sup> More subtle indications of the lower status of women in Brothertown, at least in the eyes of the state, were present in the first census of

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<sup>106</sup> “An Act for the Relief of the Indians residing in Brother-town and Stockbridge” (1791) *Laws of the Colonial and State Governments, Relating to Indians and Indian Affairs, from 1633 to 1831*, 265.

<sup>107</sup> Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone*, 82.

<sup>108</sup> Daniel R. Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780–1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 16.

Brothertown, taken in 1795. For each family, the male children were listed first, in descending age order, followed by female children.<sup>109</sup>

Women living in Brothertown and Stockbridge were also occasionally subject to domestic violence. On February 24, 1800, George Peters killed his wife Eunice by beating her with a club or wooden poker. The social imbalance of the couple is notable: Eunice was the daughter of Elijah Wampy, a frequent peacemaker and one of the major political leaders of Brothertown, whereas George was the son of Elizabeth Peters, who had immigrated to Brothertown as a 58-year-old widow with four or five adult children in 1795.<sup>110</sup> Writing nearly a century after the murder, historian William DeLoss Love described George Peters as having an “evil temper” and being “intemperate.” While Love’s assessment of Peters’ character may have been based primarily on the murder incident, the circumstances of the incident do point to either alcohol or perhaps estrangement from the Brothertown community as playing a role: Eunice was killed in Rome, a large white settlement in upstate New York about fifteen miles from Brothertown, and a place where Brothertown Natives regularly had to travel to conduct trade or mail letters. The Oneida County coroner was able to perform an autopsy of Eunice’s body shortly after her death, and George was taken into custody at the county jail. Although several indigenous people testified during his court case – enough that the cost of providing food for them totaled over seven dollars – George was convicted of capital murder by an entirely white jury and sentenced to death by hanging in 1781.<sup>111</sup> In

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<sup>109</sup> Brothertown Census, 16 September 1795, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804, 8-11.

<sup>110</sup> Love, *Samson Ocom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 356, 364–65.

<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County*, 43; Christopher Morgan, *Documentary History of the State of New York* (Albany: Weed, Parsons & Company, 1851), 514; Carolyn Strange, *Discretionary Justice: Pardon and Parole in New York from the Revolution to the Depression* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 56.

1809, Abigail Brushel brought a case in the Brothertown Tribal Court against Samuel Brushel, for assault and battery. This strategy appeared to work in Abigail's favor: the two "agreed not to live together any longer," and Samuel was held responsible for the court costs.<sup>112</sup> Brothertown women were not necessarily more vulnerable to male violence than other indigenous women in the region. For example, an 1803-1804 nativist revival in Oneida, inspired by Seneca prophet Handsome Lake, led to a mania for witch-hunting within certain Oneida villages, culminating in the execution of two Oneida women by the rest of their village due to their suspected connections with witchcraft.<sup>113</sup>

Brothertown's racial policy demonstrates impediments to women's agency most clearly. The deed to Oneida lands that the Brothertown founders acquired in 1774 stated that anyone from the seven founding tribes could move there, with one exception: "any persons of the said Tribes who are descended from, or have intermixed with Negros, or Mulattoes."<sup>114</sup> This statement only gave a glimpse into the Brothertown founders' complicated relationship with people of African descent. Men like Samson Occom and Joseph Johnson had often attended church services with free Blacks in New England. Occom, in particular, praised the religious insights of African-American poet Phillis Wheatley (see chapter 4) and described a biracial person of white and African descent as "an extraordinary man in understanding and a great preacher."<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, New

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<sup>112</sup> Abigail Brushel, plaintiff, versus Samuel Brushel, defendant, May 1809, Brothertown Court Record Book, 1797-1839, Brothertown Nation Collection (currently held by the Oneida Cultural Center at Green Bay). It is difficult to ascertain the relationship between Abigail and Samuel because both Samuel's mother and his wife were named Abigail. In one 1808 document, Samuel's wife was referred to as "Abigail Brushel Jr.," so the most likely scenario is that the case involved a mother accusing her son of battery. Samuel's mother Abigail, probably then went to live with another of her four children. See Female Moral Society minutes, 7 November 1808, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>113</sup> Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, 381.

<sup>114</sup> "Deed to Oneida Lands," 4 October 1774, in Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, 242-43.

<sup>115</sup> Diary of Samson Occom, 31 May 1787, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 365-66.

England tribes in the eighteenth century often strove to separate themselves politically from Black populations, worried that colonial racism and slave codes could impact their tribes more deeply if African-descendant and indigenous groups were seen as occupying similar socio-political rungs on the ladder of colonial society. In the 1750s, 1760s, and 1770s, the Montauketts, Narragansetts, and Mohegans – the original tribes of most of the Brothertown -- had all declared that Afro-descendants (or any women married to someone of African descent) would not be entitled to live on tribal land.<sup>116</sup> According to historian Joanna Brooks, colonial legislatures also banned exogamous marriage between tribal communities in an attempt “to hasten indigenous population decline.”<sup>117</sup>

Moreover, tribal tradition seemed to indicate that Brothertown women who married men from outside the tribe would forfeit their membership in Brothertown, and that women who married into the tribe would become part of Brothertown. In 1839, a group of Brothertown men explained that the condition of a wife “in all cases follows the condition of the husband. When our men choose a partner for life from a foreign tribe, she is introduced among the people of her husband and is considered...as a member of the Tribe to all intents and purposes. ...Thus the wife adopts the Nation of her husband and is in return adopted by it.”<sup>118</sup> Although this description of longstanding Brothertown tradition was written fifty-some years after the tribe was founded, genealogical records generally align with this statement.<sup>119</sup> For example, the children of two Brothertown

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<sup>116</sup> Daniel R. Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History: Native Americans in Southern New England, 1780–1880* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), chap. 2.

<sup>117</sup> “Introduction: This Indian World,” in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Brothertown Commissioners to President Martin van Buren, 2 July 1839, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Rudi Ottery Papers, MSS 395, Box 53, folder 1.

<sup>119</sup> One possible exception to this rule was a couple named “Mr. Tucks,” an Englishman, and his Narragansett wife. Samson Occom visited their home in Connecticut in early 1786 and noted in his diary that they had “a notion to move up to Oneida,” which generally, in Occom’s diary, meant moving to Brothertown. However, there is no clear evidence to demonstrate that Mr. Tucks and his wife ever tried to

women who married Stockbridge men, Pually Fowler and Cynthia Simons, were fully incorporated into Stockbridge lineage.<sup>120</sup> There also does not seem to have been any objection to William Coyhis moving to Brothertown in 1800 with his white wife; their children inherited their own lots of land at Brothertown in 1804.<sup>121</sup> Arnold Skeesuck similarly married a white woman named Hannah Walker, while staying on the tribal rolls.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the gender difference explains why, in contrast, Charlotta Secuter disappeared from the Brothertown records after marrying a white man named John Wilber.<sup>123</sup>

In 1789, the Brothertown added a resolution to their town governance declaring specifically that “that if any of our Indian women or girls shall marry negro, or any intermix with negro, shall forfeit all right and privilege to the Brothertown lands, and further agreed upon that she or they shall immediately be removed out of the said town.”<sup>124</sup> Brothertown women, however, did not always comply with this decision. They married black men despite the prohibitions on marriage to Africans and Afro-descendants, while also attempting to join Brothertown. In some ways, this may have been a choice made out of necessity: the impact of the Revolutionary War (in which many indigenous men fought and were killed) and the need for indigenous men to travel in search of employment caused a dearth of potential indigenous male marriage partners

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join Brothertown -- but it is notable that Occom did not express any opposition to this plan. Journal of Samson Occom, 7 February 1786, in Brooks, *The Collected Writings of Samson Occom, Mohegan*, 328.

<sup>120</sup> Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 345, 361.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 363; Arnold Skeesuck’s name appears on “A list of the number of Indians in Brothertown on the first day of June, 1836,” ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 3 Folder 1.

<sup>123</sup> Love, 359–60. Stockbridge did not have such strict laws regarding marriage; Mary Doxtator, for example, married an Oneida man yet remained part of the Stockbridge tribe.

<sup>124</sup> Superintendents’ response in the Case of Sarah Pendleton, 15 October 1796, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804, 12.

for indigenous women.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, as historian Daniel Mandell argues, marriage to a black man may have actually allowed women to exert more power in their home communities: as tribal members, women would have had more connections and influence vis-a-vis their tribe than their “outsider” husbands.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, women’s desires to incorporate their black husbands into the Brothertown project represented a distinct view of ethnic identity that contrasted with the male founders’ perspectives.

At least three women attempted to flout or challenge the rules regarding ethnic exclusivity in Brothertown. In 1796, Sarah Pendleton (Narragansett) attempted to move to Brothertown with her husband and children. She claimed the right to a portion of land because of her Narragansett ancestry, but Brothertown tribal leadership opposed her claim, “because she married a man of negro extraction.”<sup>127</sup> When questioned, the state-appointed overseers sided with Brothertown over Pendleton. A group of fourteen Brothertown men then forcibly expelled Sarah Pendleton’s son, Nathan, who had been living on a plot of land in Brothertown.<sup>128</sup> Eight years later, two other women would try to move to Brothertown: Isabella Schooner, described as “Indian, white, and negro,” married to a man of both African and indigenous descent, and Jerusha Hull, a “part Indian and part negro” woman married to “a negro.”<sup>129</sup> Based on the precedent of Sarah Pendleton’s case, as well as the tribal agreements surrounding land usage, community leaders denied both Schooner and Hull permission to live at Brothertown. What is notable

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<sup>125</sup> See, for example, John Thorton Kirkland’s 1795 report on the loss of “a number of promising young men” from Stockbridge during the Revolutionary War, quoted in Charles Allen, *Report on the Stockbridge Indians to the Legislature* (Boston: Wright & Potter, State Printers, 1870), 21.

<sup>126</sup> Mandell, *Tribes, Race, History*, 40.

<sup>127</sup> Claim of Sarah Pendleton, 15 October 1796, Hamilton College Library, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1777-1804.

<sup>128</sup> Letter of the Brothertown Superintendents, 10 April 1799, NYSA, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810.

<sup>129</sup> Brothertown Overseers’ Meeting notes, 24 July 1804. Hamilton College Library, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 40.

about these cases, however, is that both women sought to join Brothertown in the first place. As women of mixed African and indigenous descent, they must have hoped that the utopian vision of a space free from white racial prejudice could provide a better future for themselves and their families. Despite their matrilineal claims to coastal New England tribal membership, however, they were unable to secure themselves a place within Brothertown.

Stockbridge men and women clashed over a different aspect of the tribe's definition: its geographic location. Around 1810, both Brothertown and Stockbridge leaders concluded that it would be difficult to maintain their communities in New York under the growing pressure of white settlement and decided to look for land further westward. Apparently, the women of the tribe did not support this idea. For example, Mary Doxtator strongly opposed the idea that the Stockbridge tribe should relocate further west. Drawing upon her reputation as a woman of good Christian character, she petitioned the governor of New York in 1818 to prohibit the men of Stockbridge from selling their land in preparation for a move. According to Doxtator, "most of the women in her tribe" also opposed leaving New York. Specifically, the women wanted to stay in a region that was "civilized and Christianized" and were worried about the prospect of removing to "the wilderness." The Stockbridge women's desire to stay in New York, although couched in the language of civilization versus wilderness, might have had more to do with their connections to markets for selling their woven products. Doxtator also emphasized in her letter the importance of having Quaker missionaries remain with the tribe – a relationship that had been primarily built through female intermediators, and one that would not be as valuable in Wisconsin where Catholicism and Methodism generally

prevailed.<sup>130</sup> The women's opinions, however, failed to sway either the New York legislature or the Stockbridge leadership, and the sale of Stockbridge lands to fund the move westward continued. An initial group of Stockbridge Indians departed for Wisconsin in 1822, and by the end of the decade, nearly the entire tribe had relocated there.<sup>131</sup> Doxtator herself remained in New York, making every effort to convince indigenous people to remain there. When a portion of the Oneida tribe also sold their land in preparation for a move to Wisconsin, Doxtator filed an affidavit with the state of New York claiming that one of the Oneida signatories to the treaty had been induced to sign in exchange for \$100 and a suit of clothing. The New York assembly upheld the treaty, explaining the conflict as simply a difference of opinion and concluding that treaties rarely achieved "unanimous consent of all the Indians" – but at the very least, Doxtator had made a strong effort to have her position heard.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps this negative decision from the assembly, however, convinced Doxtator to finally decide to move to Wisconsin herself, although she would die in 1828 before completing the move.<sup>133</sup>

In slightly different ways, then, the women of Brothertown and Stockbridge attempted to reshape the definition and goals of their tribes. Indigenous women married to African-descendant men tried to acquire lots in Brothertown despite the prohibition on mixed-race marriages; just as in the case of Mexican nuns (see Chapter 5), their attempts to expand the socio-racial parameters of the community was staunchly rejected by men. Likewise, Stockbridge women opposed the move to Wisconsin, but eventually acquiesced to the decisions of male leaders. Despite the myriad tools women had

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<sup>130</sup> Letter from David Butler to Governor Taylor, 17 March 1818, NL, Ayer MS 127.

<sup>131</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 172.

<sup>132</sup> Tiro, *The People of the Standing Stone*, 149.

<sup>133</sup> *Journal of the Senate of the State of New York at Their Fiftieth Session* (Albany: E Croswell, 1827), 194.

acquired to improve economic self-sufficiency, wield influence in the community, and serve as examples of Christian life, their efforts to impact major decisions over the future of their tribes failed. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, the limitations to women's advocacy in these realms were a foreshadowing of things to come.

### **Stockbridge and Brothertown Women in Wisconsin**

Within twenty-five years of the founding of both Brothertown and Stockbridge, the situation in New York was becoming untenable. The state became increasingly interested in promoting travel and trade through the region, irrespective of indigenous land holdings. Between 1798 and 1809 the state developed Genesee Road, a major thoroughfare, passing directly through Oneida territory; in 1808 surveying was begun for the Erie Canal. These large-scale developments had a direct impact on the Brothertown and Stockbridge as well. The state assembly gave themselves permission to claim a portion of land from both settlements for the purposes of constructing a public house along the road. In 1807, the white superintendents of Brothertown were also given permission to lease any "unused" land within Brothertown territory, although a year later the assembly – presumably belatedly – noted that this privilege did not mean that white people could *live* within the boundaries of Brothertown, but just lease and develop the land.<sup>134</sup>

The Stockbridge connection with the Delaware led them to seek land further west, at first in Indiana near the White River, where another portion of the Delaware tribe had settled. Stockbridge sachem Hendrick Aupaumut, accompanied by four Brothertown

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<sup>134</sup> "An Act to amend an Act, entitled 'An Act relative to Indians,'" 3 April 1807, and "An Act for the Benefit of the Brothertown Indians," 3 April 1808, both in *Laws of the State of New York, Containing All the Acts of the 30th, and the Public Acts of the 31st and 32nd Sessions of the Legislature.*, vol. 5 (Albany, NY: Websters and Skinner, 1809), 133, 362.

men, even carried out a visit to White River in the summer of 1809 to scope out prospects for the two tribes.<sup>135</sup> Once again, however, war would delay any migration plans: the outbreak of Tecumseh's War and the War of 1812 made both the Canadian border and the Ohio River Valley dangerous places to be, especially for indigenous people. And when the dust settled around the end of the decade, the Brothertown and Stockbridge were dismayed to discover that the United States had claimed all of Delaware land in Indiana through the Treaty of St. Mary's (1818), negating their tribes' efforts to purchase land from the Delaware. And yet white settlement in New York continued to grow: an 1823 letter from white inhabitants of upstate New York, asking permission to continue leasing lands at New Stockbridge, claimed that "the Stockbridge Indians are surrounded by a thick settled white population."<sup>136</sup>

Instead, the Brothertown and Stockbridge, along with a portion of the Oneida, St. Regis, Onondaga, and Tuscarora tribes turned their gaze further west, to Wisconsin. In conversations facilitated by the United States government, which had a vested interest in settling more allied groups in northern Wisconsin, delegates from these groups, known collectively as the New York Indians met with Ho-Chunk, Menominee, and Winnebago representatives near Green Bay. In 1821 and 1822, the New York Indians signed treaties with the Menominee and Winnebago for a portion of land in Wisconsin. Two years later,

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<sup>135</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 160.

<sup>136</sup> The Memorial of the Subscribers, inhabitants of the counties of Oneida and Madison and residing in the vicinity of New Stockbridge to the New York State Legislature, 1823, NYSA, A1823 Petitions, Correspondence, and reports relating to Indians, 1783-1831.

the Brothertown officially joined in with the migration plan, signing an agreement with the rest of the New York Indians that would include them in the Wisconsin land grant.<sup>137</sup>

Within a few months of the Brothertown agreement, however, conflicts over the specific understanding of the treaty between the New York and Wisconsin tribes exploded into a protracted legal battle that would last nearly a decade. During the negotiations for the Treaty of Butte des Mortes, which would create boundaries between the Menominee and Chippawa, the Menominee declared that they had only understood that the New York Indians had sought to “procure the grant of a small piece to sit down upon, that they might live with us like brothers. We never comprehended, either that they wished, or that they had, purchased any part of our territory.”<sup>138</sup> The Brothertown, for their part, pleaded with federal authorities to confirm their territory in Wisconsin, writing to both President James Monroe in 1825 and Andrew Jackson in 1830 asking that Congress “confirm to the Brothertown Indians and their posterity forever the land thus purchased.”<sup>139</sup> Confirmation of Brothertown and Stockbridge lands in Wisconsin would eventually come in 1831, but at a cost: members of both tribes who had begun emigrating in the 1820s had settled on the Fox River, just south of Green Bay, but the 1831 decision assigned them land on the shores of Lake Winnebago, some twenty-five miles further south.<sup>140</sup> With few other options, the Stockbridge and Brothertown packed up once again

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<sup>137</sup> See Oberly, *A Nation of Statesmen*, Chapter 2; A Treaty between the Oneida, Tuscarora, St Regis, Stockbridge, and Munsee nations of Indians in the State of New York, and the Brothertown Nation of Indians, 5 April 1824, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.

<sup>138</sup> Lewis Cass and Thomas L. McKinney, Journal of a Treaty, made and concluded at Butte des Mortes, August 1827, NL, Documents relating to the Negotiation of ratified and unratified treaties with various tribes of Indians, 1801-69, RG75, Reel 2.

<sup>139</sup> Inhabitation [sic] of Brothertown to James Monroe, 28 February 1825, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Rudi Ottery Papers, MSS 395, Box 39, folder 31; Brothertown Indians to Andrew Jackson, 27 December 1830, NL, Thomas Dean papers.

<sup>140</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 172–83; Jarvis, *The Brothertown Nation of Indians*, 184–215.

and trekked to their newly-established homelands. By the mid-1830s, almost the entirety of both tribes had left New York.

During the transitional years and into the early period in Wisconsin, some of the strategies that had served Native women well continued to function. Although Mary Doxtator opposed the move westward, she continued to have an influential role within the Stockbridge tribe – and a strong reputation among local white populations in New York. Perhaps as a response to her tribe’s decision to move, in the early 1820s Doxtator seems to have sought out recommendations from white supporters, which confirmed her character and highlighted the value of her spinning school. Recommendations from 1820, 1821, and 1823 were all copied onto the same sheet of paper, perhaps presented all together by Doxtator as a sort of currency for moving within an increasingly white world. The recommendations came from Thomas Dean, the schoolteacher and legal representative of the Brothertown, as well as from members of the Presbyterian church in Onondaga Hollow, New York, and Nathaniel Rose, a physician.<sup>141</sup> Male tribemembers also entrusted Doxtator with their legal representation. In 1824, a group of eleven Stockbridge men appointed Doxtator to represent them in Albany, “to do all business transactions as she the said Mary deemeth right.”<sup>142</sup> The following year, another group – of both men and women – designated Doxtator as their power of attorney in a statement that perfectly encapsulates the way that Native women gained influence and authority during this period. “For diverse good deeds heretofore done and shown by that bearer Mary Doxtator... [we appoint her to] be our lawful attorney, to go to Albany, to assist

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<sup>141</sup> Thomas Dean et al recommendation of Mary Doxtator, 14 February 1820; Circular Letter of Rev James H. Mills et al, 18 January 1821; Nathaniel Rose recommendation of Mary Doxtator, 24 February 1823, all in ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>142</sup> Samuel L. Hubbard et al, 20 January 1824, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 12.

John W. Quinney, Solomon N. Hendrick, Jacob P. Seth, and John Metoxen in transacting our business relative to our Nation with the Legislature of the State of New York.”<sup>143</sup> The four men listed all had been prominent leaders of the Stockbridge tribe for many years. Doxtator, it seems, was chosen to join them based on her reputation for “good deeds.” In other words, Doxtator’s efforts in education and charitable outreach helped her gain more political influence.

Electa Quinney similarly represents the ways that triangulating Christian and indigenous identity could open doors for Native women. The daughter of Stockbridge leader Joseph Quinney, Electa had been educated in a Quaker boarding school on Long Island as well as Miss Royce’s Female Seminary in Clinton, New York.<sup>144</sup> She taught school in Stockbridge in New York before removing with the tribe to Wisconsin, where in 1828 she began teaching a “free school” to both indigenous and non-indigenous students near Green Bay, leading her to later be remembered as “Wisconsin’s first schoolmistress.”<sup>145</sup> When the Stockbridge tribe moved further south, Quinney went with them, and taught school there in 1832-1833, to acclaim from missionary John Clark. After her first year of teaching, he noted that “in all the branches taught there had been a very encouraging proficiency.”<sup>146</sup>

On the other hand, the trajectories of the lives of Mary Doxtator and Electa Quinney also demonstrate ways that Native women’s influence among Christian Indian

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<sup>143</sup> John Newcom et al, 18 January 1825, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1 Folder 12.

<sup>144</sup> Electa F. Jones, *Stockbridge, Past and Present, or, Records of an Old Mission Station* (Springfield, MA: Springfield, [Mass.] : S. Bowles & Co., 1854), 118, <http://archive.org/details/stockbridgepastp02jones;Saemann,ElectaQuinney,StockbridgeTeacher;Kosc,“DaughtersoftheNation:StockbridgeMohicanWomen,Education,andCitizenshipinEarlyAmerica,1790-1840,”174-75>.

<sup>145</sup> “Wisconsin Indian Tribes,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 13 January 1926.

<sup>146</sup> Barnes M. Hall, *The Life of Rev. John Clark* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 109, <http://archive.org/details/liferevjohnclar00hallgoog>.

tribes declined. Starting in 1818, Mary Doxtator had begun purchasing land from Stockbridge members who were moving west.<sup>147</sup> Eventually, it seems she acquiesced to male leader's vision for the tribe's future, and around 1827 began preparing to remove to Wisconsin herself, although she died while still in New York in 1828. After her death, a number of members of the Stockbridge tribe made claims against her estate, arguing that they had not received the full value of the land – and that Doxtator had often promised to send specific amounts of money to complete her payments, and had not done so. In some cases, she had reportedly even sold land in New York belonging to Stockbridge people who had moved to Wisconsin, without permission.<sup>148</sup> While it is unclear how this conflict was resolved, it seems that Doxtator's reputation among the tribe was somewhat tarnished.

In Quinney's case, her status as a female schoolteacher was less exceptional by the 1830s than it had been when Hannah Fowler taught school in Brothertown in 1797. For example, in 1836, Sophia Mudgett and Etherlinda Lee were sent by the Methodist society from Vermont as schoolteachers to the Oneida in Wisconsin.<sup>149</sup> By the 1860s, treaties signed by the United States and various tribes even sometimes specified payments for indigenous women who worked as schoolteachers, although the women were paid less than men.<sup>150</sup> Quinney herself married Daniel Adams (Mohawk), a

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<sup>147</sup> John Metoxen sale of land to Mary Doxtator, 20 January 1818, NL, Thomas Dean Papers; John Thautheaghoot sale of land to Mary Doxtator, 11 August 1818, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; John W Quinney sale of land to Mary Doxtator, 30 November 1818, NL, Thomas Dean Papers.

<sup>148</sup> Letter of Catherine Littleman, et al, to Thomas Dean, 12 August 1828, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.

<sup>149</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Methodism in Eastern Wisconsin*, vol. 1 (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Conference Historical Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1937), 19; Barnes M. Hall, *The Life of Rev. John Clark*, 170.

<sup>150</sup> Martha Elizabeth Layman, "A History of Indian Education in the United States" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1942), 133.

missionary sent by the Methodist board to the Oneidas in Wisconsin. In 1836, the couple moved to Missouri to minister among the Seneca there. After Adams' death, Quinney married John Walker Candy (Cherokee), a printer who was closely involved with several Cherokee newspapers. By 1855, she had returned to Wisconsin, having been widowed a second time. Although she had been involved with nearly every type of "civilized" resistance to anti-indigenous policies deployed by the United States – as an indigenous missionary among foreign tribes, and as a supporter of Native language publications – upon returning to Wisconsin she primarily occupied a maternal role. Her son, Daniel J. Adams, served in the Union forces along with a number of other men from Stockbridge and Brothertown, and wrote her several times during the war in letters filled with familial references and offers to send her a larger portion of his army salary if necessary. Other than a question about medical treatment – "there are a great many of our boys getting sick [with]...achy high fever and a chill. Do you know what would be good for them?" – little reference to Quinney's education or knowledge was made.<sup>151</sup> By the 1860s, it seems Quinney's role in the tribe coincided more closely with standard Anglo-American gender roles.

Brothertown and Stockbridge women's financial independence also declined during the move to Wisconsin. As Kallie Kosc has pointed out, the move to Wisconsin separated Stockbridge women from their Quaker sponsors back on the East Coast. Quaker financial support for the Stockbridge in New York ended in 1825, and while they debated sending support to Wisconsin, it never materialized.<sup>152</sup> The "premium" system

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<sup>151</sup> Daniel J Adams to "Mother," 8 August 1861, Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library, Dorothy "Dot" Davids Collection II, Box #2, Adams J. C. Family.

<sup>152</sup> Kosc, "Daughters of the Nation: Stockbridge Mohican Women, Education, and Citizenship in Early America, 1790-1840," 160.

that rewarded Brothertown women in New York also did not transfer to Wisconsin. Some of the annuity money was used to purchase the land in Wisconsin, as well as reimbursing the travel costs of the men who went to negotiate the purchase.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, when in 1841 the state of New York made a one-time transfer of a large portion of the annuity to the tribe in Wisconsin, the payment statute specified that “parents will receive the portion due their minor children, and husbands receive the portion due their wives.”<sup>154</sup> Whereas the premium system had allowed married women to be paid directly out of the annuity funds, the 1841 statute prioritized male money holding.

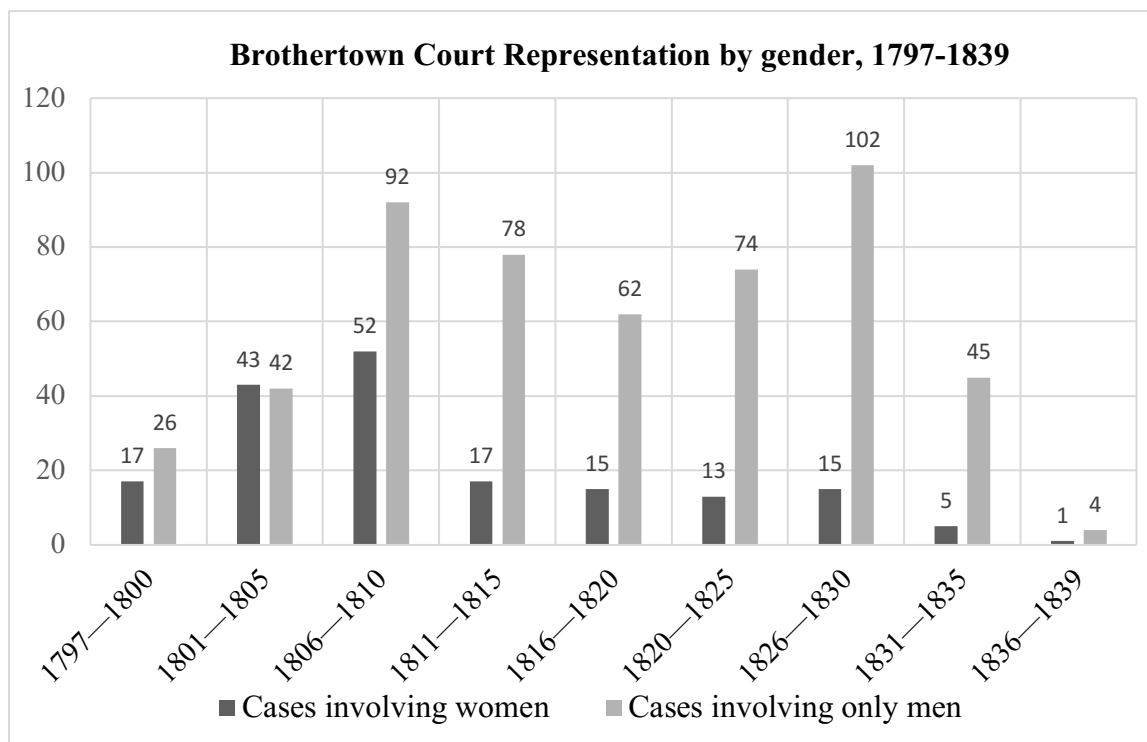
The decline in women’s financial independence was matched by their decreasing presence in the Brothertown tribal court. As mentioned earlier, women frequently appeared in court cases in Brothertown’s initial years, but after 1810 that percentage dropped rapidly. While the overall number of cases remained relatively stable, cases that involved women as either a litigant or defendant declined from 51% of the cases in 1801-1806, to less than 15% in 1826-1830. Moreover, the types of cases changed: rather than women suing their borrowers for the repayment of a debt, women were now more often prosecuted for failing to keep the Sabbath. In 1828, for the first time, male proxies represented women in court, instead of the women themselves appearing. After 1835, there was only a single case that involved a woman – and that case was initiated by a man.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> 1824 Report of the Superintendents, 1 January 1825, NYSA, A1823 Petitions, Correspondence, and reports relating to Indians, 1783-1831.

<sup>154</sup> Certificate of Annuity, 8 June 1841, NYSA, A4609-97, Original Indian Treaties and Deeds.

<sup>155</sup> Brothertown Court Record Book, 1797-1839, Brothertown Nation Collection (currently held by the Oneida Cultural Center at Green Bay).



**Table 1**

Moreover, according to nineteenth-century historian William DeLoss Love, at some point the Brothertown actively prohibited women from appearing in court. He cited an ordinance from the Brothertown Town Record book which stated that it would not be lawful “that any woman shall be permitted to speak that has causes depending in the Brothertown courts without asking some particular question, or she shall apply to some suitable man to speak in her behalf.”<sup>156</sup> The *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County*, published in 1851, cited many of the same ordinances, or by-laws, that Love mentioned in his history, although not the proscription of women’s participation in court. Both Love and the *Annals* referenced a “Book of Brothertown Records (1796-1843),” but the location of this book is not currently known.<sup>157</sup> The *Annals* explained that the Brothertown had sent a messenger to collect both the Court Record book and the Town

<sup>156</sup> Love, *Samson Ocom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 302.

<sup>157</sup> Megan Fulopp, e-mail to author, 31 May 2019.

Record book in 1850, but for some reason the Town Record book had been left behind.<sup>158</sup>

The decline of women's presence in the Brothertown courts, and the appearance of male proxies in 1828, indicates that this ordinance may have been among the later decrees added to the book.

As both Brothertown and Stockbridge debated the best options for tribal preservation in the 1830s, women's voices continued to disappear from official tribal records. The decade of debate (1822 – 1831) over their legal right to land in Wisconsin, following shortly on the heels of their failed attempts to secure land in Indiana in 1818, had made it clear that indigenous landholding was likely to be constantly challenged. The 1830 Indian Removal Act, which promoted the removal of most tribes to the western half of the United States whether by treaty or force, further endangered Wisconsin reservations. In late 1838, the Brothertown decided in a town meeting to seek to become U. S. citizens, hoping citizenship would allow them to hold onto their territory and not be forced to remove once again. Their petition to Congress to initiate this transformation, however, was signed only by men (twenty-three altogether), leaving women's perspectives unrecorded.<sup>159</sup> Legally, U. S. citizenship benefited men more than women: the men of Brothertown gained the ability to vote in local and national elections, become property owners recognized by the U. S. government, and hold positions in local office, while the women became subject to legal coverture if married, and were excluded from voting.<sup>160</sup> Individual ownership of lots also had the consequence of promoting diasporic movement of the tribe: many families sold their land and moved to Kansas, Minnesota, or

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<sup>158</sup> Jones, *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County*, 270.

<sup>159</sup> Inhabitants of Deansborough, letter to US Congress, undated [1839], New England Historic Genealogical Society, Rudi Ottery Papers, MSS 395, Box 39, folder 69.

<sup>160</sup> Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 196.

elsewhere in Wisconsin. By 1875 only 20% of the families living within Brothertown Township, Wisconsin, were of Brothertown descent.<sup>161</sup>

The Stockbridge, on the other hand, hotly debated the question of U.S. citizenship in the 1840s but eventually decided to maintain official tribal status.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, Anglo-American gender norms still seem to have made an impact on men's and women's public roles. In 1837, for example, twenty-five men and fifteen women attended a meeting to discuss the future of the Stockbridge tribe, but while nearly half of the men present were recorded as speaking, not a single woman's comment or question was recorded.<sup>163</sup> A new Stockbridge Constitution was created in 1840 by the "Chiefs and Warriors of the Stockbridge Nation" and signed by 55 men, but no women.<sup>164</sup> While Brothertown and Stockbridge women certainly continued to have important positions as keepers of memory and people of influence within their families, by the mid-nineteenth century, the window of opportunity for them to be recognized simultaneously by both their tribes and external powers as legal representatives, financial keystones, or schoolteachers seems to have closed.

Despite women's decline in financial independence and the changing gender roles in the tribes, women continued to make an impact, albeit a hidden one, in one particular realm: maintaining familial connections that stretched beyond the defined racial boundaries of Brothertown and Stockbridge. In 1839, a group of five Brothertown men elected as commissioners by the male members of the tribe began the work of dividing

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<sup>161</sup> Secretary of Indian Affairs, "Proposed Finding Against Acknowledgment of The Brothertown Indian Nation (Petitioner #67)" (2009), 34.

<sup>162</sup> Oberly, *A Nation of Statesmen*, chapter 3; Silverman, *Red Brethren*, 198–206.

<sup>163</sup> Stockbridge General Meeting Minutes, 21 June 1837, Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library, John C Adams Papers, File 2.

<sup>164</sup> 1840 Stockbridge Constitution, Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library, John C Adams Papers, File 17.

Brothertown land into individual lots. They complained to President Martin Van Buren that they were surprised at the number of women who appeared and attempted to make claims to Brothertown land or a portion of the Brothertown annuity payment, despite having “separated themselves from our people at various periods” by marrying outside the tribe. The Brothertown commissioners succeeded in continuing to exclude these women from tribal registers, but the very appearance of these women raises an interesting point: while the writer, Brothertown Alonzo Dick described these women as being “dead” in terms of the tribe’s obligation to them, clearly the women did not feel themselves so distant from the tribe’s affairs.<sup>165</sup> Instead, these women were well-informed of the important goings-on within the tribe, indicating that the separation between these women and Brothertown was not as clearly demarcated as Dick and other male leaders may have believed.

Native women’s relationships with African-descendant men also contributed to the formation of new communities in Wisconsin and perhaps further afield. Rev. Moses Stanton, a Baptist minister of mixed Narragansett and African descent, moved to Wisconsin in the 1840s with his Narragansett wife, Catherine. They settled some ten miles away from Brothertown Township, in Chilton, Wisconsin. As an elderly woman, Catherine reminisced about frequent trips between their home and Brothertown Township; some historians have identified the couple as moving directly to Brothertown, Wisconsin. The Stantons never formally became members of Brothertown (although the legal structures of tribal enrollment no longer existed by the time they moved anyway) but it seems likely that the similarity of Catherine’s Narragansett identity and

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<sup>165</sup> Alonzo Dick et al to President Martin Van Buren, 2 July 1839, New England Historic Genealogical Society, Rudi Ottery Papers, MSS 395, Box 53, folder 1.

Brothertown identity was one of the factors that compelled them to move to that specific region of Wisconsin.<sup>166</sup> Nathan Pendleton, the son of Sarah Pendleton who had been expelled from Brothertown for marrying a black man in 1797, apparently remained living in the region of Brothertown, New York, and ended up marrying a Brothertown woman (who was subsequently expelled from the tribe). Their son, Sarah's grandson, also moved from upstate New York to the Green Bay area in the 1840s, suggesting that perhaps he had maintained contact with his Brothertown cousins and other family members.<sup>167</sup> Paul Cuffee, a African-Wampanoag merchant married to a Pequot woman, attempted to found a Christian community of free blacks in Sierra Leon in the early 1810s. Cuffee not only knew that coastal indigenous people had founded Christian Indian communities in upstate New York, but also that he was related to some of them: his son (who identified as a Pequot) recalled visiting cousins at Stockbridge, and Cuffee read a letter from Christian Oneida at one of the first church services he held in Sierra Leon.<sup>168</sup> Although these examples do not directly demonstrate that it was matrilineal connections that brought African-descendant people to northern Wisconsin, or inspired the creation of further

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<sup>166</sup> Petition of Moses Stanton to the General Assembly of Rhode Island, 18 January 1843, Rhode Island Historical Society, Shepley Collection, vol 7, p 72; "Chilton's First Woman Settler," *Calumet Shopper*, Chilton, Wisconsin, Vol 2, No. 14, February 1947, 1-2 (NB: The article's subheading indicates that the interview with Catherine was conducted around 1920); Mandell, *Tribe, Race, History*, 105.

<sup>167</sup> Claim of Sarah Pendleton, 15 October 1796, Hamilton College Library, Rare Book Room, Brotherton [sic] Indian Records, 1774-1804. New York State, Superintendents of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indians; Thomas Eddy to Samuel Kirkland regarding the claim of Nathan Pendleton, 17 December 1798, New York State Archives, Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810; Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England*, 353; "Death of a Centenarian, Mr. Peter Pendleton," *Shawano County Journal*, July 29, 1887, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/145107172/peter-pendleton>. Sarah's son Nathan, apparently of age in 1796, tried to claim a lot in Brothertown and was forcibly expelled. Nevertheless, around the same time he must have married Mary Niles, a Brothertown woman; their son Peter was born in 1797.

<sup>168</sup> Paul Cuffee, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Paul Cuffee, A Pequot Indian: During Thirty Years Spent at Sea, and in Travelling in Foreign Lands* (Vernon, NY: Printed by Horace N. Bill, 1839), 21, <http://archive.org/details/narrativeoflifea00cuff>; Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 227.

Christian communities for racial minorities, they certainly suggest that possibility.

Stockbridge and Brothertown women may not have been able to convince their tribes to accept marriage to outsiders or to remain in New York, but they maintained connections nevertheless, and it seems likely that their familial relationships helped the tribes' influence expand beyond what male leaders had envisioned.

### **Part 3: Conclusion**

The foundation of Christian Indian spaces in Mexico and the United States in the mid-eighteenth century created a new avenue of agency for Native women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – even if, as chapters five and six have shown, the window of opportunity for certain strategies only remained open for a short period of time. In both countries, indigenous women used their positionality at the intersection of indigenous and Christian identity to gain influence over politicians, missionaries, priests and ministers. Intentionally deploying their reputations as “good Christian Indians,” the women were able to advocate for other indigenous people, acquire and hold leadership positions, and provide for the economic security of their communities.

The biggest difference between the two countries was how and when this window of opportunity closed. In the United States, Stockbridge and Brothertown land holdings were almost constantly challenged, and within twenty-five years of their foundations, both communities began looking to relocate. Although the phrase “Manifest Destiny” referring to United States’ border expansion would not be coined until the 1840s, expansionary politics, increasing settler colonialism, and a federal focus on Indian removal had a major impact on tribes living east of the Mississippi in the early 1800s. Women were not specifically targeted by federal policy, but both tribes’ removal to Wisconsin disrupted some of the networks and connections that Native women had worked hard to put into place. Moreover, increasing pressure to demonstrate levels of “civility” through, among other things, conforming with Anglo-American gender norms, led to the exclusion of women from the Brothertown court system and a general decline in female representation in tribal decisions.

In Mexico, royal protection of indigenous groups remained nominally in place through 1811, and the political chaos of the subsequent decade's fight for Mexican independence meant that there were few major and long-lasting shifts in government-Native relationships through 1819. Over the next forty years, federal-level Mexican positions on the Catholic Church and indigenous polities would swing wildly back and forth, but ultimately settle on a series of laws that limited ecclesiastical property holdings, discouraged indigenous identity in politics, and closed convents. In the early years of Mexican independence, these rapidly-changing policies prevented the establishment of any additional convents for indigenous women and placed the existing convents into a more tenuous financial position – particularly because they were officially prevented from using their indigeneity to make any special claims to funds or fundraising. Native convents also came to a much more abrupt end than their counterpart Christian Indian communities in the United States. The closure of all convents stripped Native women of legal recognition of their positions as abbesses or even vowed religious, while also causing the communities themselves to shrink and eventually disappear.

Nevertheless, indigenous women during the height of their participation in Christian Indian spaces often used similar strategies in both Mexico and the United States. First of all, they worked to establish relationships with non-Natives, particularly those who were generally supportive of indigenous interests or had held important political positions. In Stockbridge and Brothertown, it was the women who first reached out to Quaker missionaries and suggested that their daughters be educated in Philadelphia. In addition to the physical presence of Stockbridge girls in Quaker homes, letters exchanged between Stockbridge and Brothertown women and the Quaker women

kept this relationship alive even when the men of both tribes were somewhat suspicious of Quaker motives. In Mexico, the indigenous abbesses of the convents developed a friendly correspondence with several viceroys of Mexico, sending them greetings on their feast days, gifts at Christmas times, and other such communications. While these types of communications were somewhat formulaic and unexceptional for the time, the indigenous abbesses wrote particularly affect-laden letters that seemed to pique the interest of the viceroys and made them more sympathetic to later requests.

The impact of these epistolary exchanges was buoyed by other textual representations of Christian Indian women. Euro-American missionaries and priests frequently wrote about the sanctity of Christian indigenous women, more often than they wrote about men. Far from being passive subjects of these missionary letters, hagiographies, and sermons, the women actively welcomed and even helped shape this representation of themselves. In Mexico, the indigenous nuns participated in writing some of the life stories of their most exemplary sisters, recording their experiences for posterity as well as circulation throughout the Spanish empire. In the United States, Samuel Kirkland, a minister stationed with the Stockbridge, described the pious death of a Brothertown woman as a moment that caused him to begin to view the tribe more favorably. Several other missionaries, government representatives, and even indigenous leaders would follow suit, using just one example of an indigenous woman's sanctity in order to convey the promising outlook for Christianity in the entire tribe.

Indigenous women then intentionally and explicitly drew upon these relationships and their reputations in order to improve the material conditions of their lives and the lives of their fellow indigenous people. In Mexico, the Nahua Madre Theodora convinced

the viceroy to join a spiritual fraternity which would help fund the convent, a request to which he enthusiastically acquiesced. Madre Theodora, along with many other nuns from the Corpus Christi convent, also wrote letters of support for indigenous men who were seeking employment or special favors from the Mexican government. In these cases, the women made their arguments almost entirely through references to female sanctity and the benefits of women-only Christian spaces – whether arguing that Madre Theodora’s brother deserved a job because his sister was a person whose accomplishments were “worthy of attention” or claiming that don Miguel Mariano should be appointed court translator based partly on his service to the convent during the feast of Corpus Christi.<sup>1</sup> In New York, Mary Doxtator (Stockbridge) used her connections with both Quaker missionaries and local white churches to gather supplies for her sewing and weaving school, which would help the tribe gain economic independence from untrustworthy traders. As one of the donors explained, it was specifically Doxtator’s reputation as a good Christian woman that convinced him to make a donation.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, indigenous women made crucial contributions to the financial stability of Christian Indian communities through other strategies beyond direct personal appeals. The nuns of Corpus Christi proposed a special indulgence that would help increase donations to Capuchin churches and therefore enlarge indigenous convent coffers as well. In Brothertown, women participated at a higher rate in New York State’s “premium” system, out-earning men through their production of cloth and collection of goose

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<sup>1</sup> Sor Maria Sebastiana de Jesus Nazereno, letter to viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez y Madrid, 21 February 1786, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1; Sor Maria Felipa de Jesús et al., letter to Viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa, 1 June 1773, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

<sup>2</sup> Circular Letter of Rev James H. Mills et al, 18 January 1821, ISA, Dean Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

feathers. The Brothertown Court Record book contains ample evidence that women were highly involved in the economic life of the tribe, particularly in the first few decades after the tribe was founded.

Finally, Native women used membership in Christian Indian communities to attain leadership positions that would not have been available to them otherwise. Of course, in general the indigenous tribes, cultures, and ethnicities present in the regions where Christian Indian communities emerged had long accorded certain leadership positions to women; in some cases those tribes or ethnicities were even organized around matriarchal or parallel structures. What was unusual about the achievements of indigenous women in Christian Indian communities, therefore, was that they achieved leadership positions that were simultaneously recognized by Euro-American political authorities as well as indigenous groups. For women like Madre Theodora, Sor Dominga, and Madre Luisa, serving as the abbess of an indigenous convent gave them access to viceroys and bishops in a way that remained barred to the majority of Native Mexican women. In New York and Wisconsin, Brothertown and Stockbridge women served as state- or missionary-appointed schoolteachers, a ground-breaking accomplishment.

Notably, Native women in both Mexico and the United States faced similar limitation to the effectiveness of their activism: their attempts to expand access to Christian Indian spaces to a broader range of class-based or racial identity. In Mexico, the first three convents for indigenous women were created exclusively for *cacica* and *principal* women, excluding non-elite Native women. When proposing the creation of additional convents, the nuns of Corpus Christi in particular embraced a version of Native identity that did not distinguish so clearly between indigenous classes. Instead, they

argued that any woman of honorable birth and good reputation could be qualified to become a nun. On this point, the nuns of Corpus Christi were supported by the abbess of Cosamaloapan, and to a lesser degree by the abbess of the Cacicas' Convent in Oaxaca. Local bishops, however, along with the *fiscal de los indios*, seem to have been enraged by the suggestion. Maintaining caste purity and strict social hierarchies remained a priority for Spanish colonial officials, and the nuns' attempt to blur these definitions met with staunch opposition. In the United States, it was Native men who opposed women's attempts to incorporate non-Native men into Brothertown through marriage. Given the context of strong racial prejudice against black populations by the governing white class, the position of the Brothertown men made pragmatic sense. Nevertheless, indigenous women continued to embark on relationships with black men and seemed to hope that Brothertown could become a protected space for their mixed-race families. Although women never succeeded at formally changing this policy, the kinship networks they created often indicate the preservation of certain relationships between Afro-descendent and indigenous individuals and families in both New York and Wisconsin.

Comparing Native women's activism with the gendered rhetoric used by men in establishing these spaces (see chapters three and four) also indicates some similarities between female indigenous perspectives across the Americas that contrast with the arguments of male indigenous actors. When arguing for the creation of Christian Indian spaces, indigenous men often focused on the symbolic value of the places they hoped to create. In their 1769 petition, the caciques argued that the establishment of a convent for indigenous women in Oaxaca would demonstrate the religiosity of local Native groups

and accrue honor to their people.<sup>3</sup> The caciques' preferred location for the convent, in the heart of the colonial city center, underscored the symbolic value of the institution. When Sor Dominga campaigned for the establishment of new convents for Native women, however, she focused on the women who were going to inhabit the convent: their longings, their efforts, and their frustration at being turned away. For Sor Dominga, the creation of additional Christian Indian spaces was not a symbolic effort, but a natural and concrete outgrowth of her belief that indigenous women were called by God to become nuns, and were prevented in fulfilling their vocations by the lack of physical space for them. Similarly, Brothertown men also espoused notions of honor and masculinity. Brothertown, promised Joseph Johnson, would be a place where his Native compatriots could become truly men.<sup>4</sup> The women of Brothertown and Stockbridge, however, rarely focused on such abstract conceptualizations of gender. Instead, they worked to improve the lives of women within the community, promoting their financial well-being, education, and security. In both locations, indigenous men were more concerned with the symbolic impact that their Christian Indian institution would make on the colonial landscape, while indigenous women focused on the lives and experiences of the people who would inhabit those same institutions.

On a concluding note: these chapters have focused primarily on Christianity as an identity label, rather than analyzing the Christian belief, practice, or theology of Native

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<sup>3</sup> Don Manuel Velasco y Victoria, don Vicente Velasco y Victoria, and don Manuel Velasco de Aguilar, letter to the Oaxacan cabildo, 27 June 1769, NL Ayer MS 1144, 162, see also Mónica Díaz, "'Es Honor de Su Nación': Legal Rhetoric, Ethnic Alliances and the Opening of an Indigenous Convent in Colonial Oaxaca," *Colonial Latin American Review* 22, no. 2 (August 2013): 235–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10609164.2013.808470>.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Johnson and Farmington Indians to Indian Brethren at Mohegan, Niantuck, Pequit, Stonington, Narraganset, and Montauk, 13 October 1773, in Laura J Murray, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren: The Writings of Joseph Johnson, 1751-1776* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 199.

women within these communities. This is primarily because the source base indicates that for the most part, indigenous women in Christian Indian communities practiced an orthodox version of Christianity that did not noticeably differ from the religiosity of their white or Euro-American female counterparts. They used the same devotional books, followed the same religious rules, and generally complied with the directives of Euro-American Christian authorities.

Nevertheless, there are subtle indications of the ways that their experiences as Native women intersected with their understanding of Christian doctrine. Indigenous women in both the United States and Mexico seem to have used Christianity as a way of coping with the psychological pain of colonization and racial discrimination. Sor Dominga's letters stand as a clear example of this trait. Throughout her petitions for new convents – a campaign that spanned over a decade – she continually invoked the intervention of the saints in the hopes that they could bring justice to a situation that she found unjust. “We ask Your Majesty to concede to us [permission to build two convents], for the love of God, and by the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Our Holiest Lady, and through our patron Saint Joseph,” she wrote to king Charles III.<sup>5</sup> As the rejections of her plan accumulated, so did the desperation of her appeals: in 1784 she wrote, frustrated at stalled paperwork, “I beg of you, by the blood of Christ and the merits of Holy Mary, to send us the report.”<sup>6</sup> Throughout her letters, Sor Dominga conveys her belief that colonial authorities are unfairly preventing indigenous women from pursuing holy lives, and her hope that divine intervention can overcome Spanish callousness.

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<sup>5</sup> Sor Dominga, letter to king Charles III, 21 May 1779, AGN, Templos y Conventos, Vol 311/34580/3/Exp 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sor Dominga, letter to viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez, 14 January 1784, AGN, Instituciones Coloniales/Templos y Conventos/Vol 21/34290/1/Exp 1.

A letter from a Stockbridge woman indicates a similar theology. In 1819, Mary Konkapot was part of the Stockbridge delegation that began the initial move westward; her father and many other family members remained in New York. When writing to her father, Konkapot describes how Christianity could help overcome the pain of being separated from family. “You do not love to have me go into this new country,” she wrote to her father, who had remained in New York, “but the same Lord is here that is there, and if you will pray every day, I will pray too, so we shall meet the same Lord together.” Through being supernaturally reunited with her family members through the Christian concept of resurrection, Konkapot expressed her belief that dispossession from their native lands would not be the end of the story for the Stockbridge.

Sor Dominga and Mary Konkapot’s hopes for divine relief from racial prejudice was never, of course, fully realized. Still, they were not wrong in believing that Christian identity could at least partially ameliorate this oppression. For a small window of time during the transition from colony to full-fledged national power, membership in a Christian Indian community was a viable strategy for indigenous women to exert agency, attain leadership positions, and provide for the women of their nations – and perhaps find some spiritual comfort as well.

## Conclusion

In 1764, a Boston merchant named John Smith visited Moor's Indian Charity School, where part of his tour involved visiting a farm where one of Moor's female students lived. Eleazar Wheelock was happy to show off his accomplishments and positioned Smith so he could get a glimpse of the girl without her knowledge. This hidden position allowed Smith to see, in his words, "the savageness of an Indian molded into the sweetness of a follower of the Lamb," a sight which he said gave him "exquisite pleasure."<sup>1</sup> Two hundred and twenty-nine years later, Oaxacan historian Luis Castañeda Guzmán would praise the nuns of the Cacicas' Convent, writing, "I believe that the example of unselfishness and faithfulness of these women who sacrificed themselves for their ideals, merits respect and admiration...and ought to be a guide for the men of Oaxaca in search of values."<sup>2</sup> These statements, while supposedly celebrating the Christian virtues of indigenous women, also reveal the colonizing gaze of their non-Native, male, authors: the women in both statements serve as objects, unaware of their role in this discourse, embodying an idealized view of sanctity, ethnicity, and religious accomplishments.

The women thus "seen" by John Smith and Luis Castañeda Guzmán, however, were historical actors with their own goals, influence, and agency. As they interacted with various political and religious institutions, they constructed their own meanings of Christian and indigenous identity. The women studied in this dissertation all belonged to spaces that were intentionally designed to be Christian institutions that served primarily

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<sup>1</sup> John Smith, letter to a friend, 18 May 1764, quoted in William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1899), 81.

<sup>2</sup> Luis Castañeda Guzmán, *Templo de los Príncipes y Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles* (Oaxaca: Instituto Oaxaqueño de las Culturas, 1993), 58.

indigenous populations; the majority belonged to what I label “Christian Indian communities,” places founded through the initiative of indigenous people where Christianity would be practiced under indigenous leadership. Through membership in these communities, Native women developed new strategies for resisting colonialism and carving out new spaces of autonomy and agency for themselves. Comparing the experiences of these women across boundaries of empire has highlighted similarities in the ways that indigenous women responded to the pressures of racialized prejudice. Across the Americas, indigenous women living in Christian Indian communities used their specific positionality at the crossroads of religious and ethnic identity to benefit their home communities, and work to improve the material conditions, educational levels, and spiritual fulfilment of fellow Native people, particularly women.

The first part of this dissertation argued that Native girls who attended European-style schools used the knowledge they gained through their education to assert their own perspectives on the role of indigenous women in colonial society. In the mid-eighteenth century, schools for indigenous girls opened in both New England and Mexico City, due in part to a number of political currents that were surprisingly similar in both regions: the growing importance of formal education for young girls, trans-Atlantic financial support for such schools, and a general trend towards subjugating indigenous populations through cultural indoctrination rather than explicit violence, at least in regions which had been heavily settled by Europeans. All of these factors contributed to the creation of the Guadalupe School for indigenous girls in Mexico City in 1754 as well as the Female School at Moor’s Indian Charity School in Connecticut in 1761. At both locations, the curriculum was designed to mold indigenous girls into compliance with European gender

norms, particularly surrounding domesticity and religiosity. Nevertheless, students at both schools also developed strategies for exerting their own agency and resistance to this formation, particularly by wielding their literacy and rhetorical skills in letters that both helped explain the girls' own positionality, and sought to influence colonial officials. While the Guadalupe School made leadership positions available to students, something never permitted at Moor's, students at both schools used gendered strategies to construct arguments and carve out spaces of autonomy. Moreover, both schools became important nodes in Christian Indian networks that spanned the region; students and alumna at both locations helped make connections between various indigenous groups and individuals, and strengthened the sense of Christian Indian community and identity.

In the second part of this dissertation, I analyzed the creation of two particular Christian Indian communities: the Cacicas' Convent in Oaxaca, Mexico, and Brothertown in upstate New York. In both locations, indigenous men campaigned for the creation of these spaces, and left a long written record of their perspectives, motivations, and reasonings. Of course, the caciques who gathered in support of the Cacicas' Convent had to acquire formal permission for the establishment of a convent from several layers of Spanish and Catholic hierarchy, meaning that their rhetoric was shaped by the need for their argument to be convincing to non-Native people. In contrast, the Brothertown founders focused primarily on building consensus for this community among seven coastal New England tribes, although they did seek support from non-participants, such as the Oneida, the British government, and church congregations and donors. In both campaigns, however, the concept of masculinity and masculine honor held a prominent place in Native men's rhetoric. For the caciques, the convent would be an expression of

indigenous honor and reputation, serving as a visible reminder in the cityscape of local Native groups' piety, "civilization," and wealth. Although the patriarchal structures Spanish colonial society generally prohibited indigenous men from achieving social equality with European colonizers, gendered perspectives on the role of women made the idea of a convent for indigenous women more palatable to colonial authorities, and thus made the convent a more possible method of expressing male honor. The male founders of Brothertown, in contrast, hoped that establishing a community in a new location, more distant from colonial settlement, would allow them to more freely express masculine qualities of independence, authority, and self-employment. Despite the many difficulties faced by both groups, gendered rhetoric played an understudied but crucial role in gathering support for the establishment of the Cacicas' Convent and Brothertown.

The lives of women within these and similar communities was the focus of the third part of this dissertation, spanning both the rise and fall of women's leadership and influence as members of Christian Indian spaces. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, joining a Christian Indian community – such as the convents of Corpus Christi, Cosamaloapan, the Cacicas' Convent, and the Guadalupe/Nueva Enseñanza Convent, or the tribes of Brothertown and Stockbridge – gave Native women greater access to state- or religiously-sanctioned leadership positions, increased their influence over colonial officials, and opened doors to a broader range of economic opportunities. In both regions, for example, indigenous women carefully and intentionally created relationships, primarily via correspondence, with government officials and Euro-American ministers, and then deployed the social capital they had accrued through these connections on behalf of indigenous individuals, groups, and

foundations. Madre Dominga, Madre Theodora, and Mary Doxtator stand out as particularly successful representatives of these strategies, but many other women used the same approach in their interactions with powerful Euro-American men. While indigenous women did not leave as much written explanation of their support for Christian Indian communities as Native men, they demonstrated their belief in Christian Indian projects in many other ways: they joined these communities in large numbers, and became crucial economic contributors, helping to ensure the longevity of these foundations.

As federal authority in Mexico and the United States grew stronger after independence, however, both countries envisioned their developing nation-states in ways that increasingly marginalized Native groups and decreased the official role of religion in state affairs. While these pressures were not universally imposed nor felt equally across the country, they had a clear impact on the Christian Indian communities studied in this dissertation. The specific strategies of self-advocacy that were tied into identifying as a “good Christian Indian woman” lost some of their efficacy, and eventually the window of opportunity for using these strategies closed. The public role of women in Brothertown and Stockbridge declined after removal to Wisconsin in the early 1830s, while the closure of Mexican convents in the 1860s marked the end of convents for Native women.

Christian indigenous women did not, of course, disappear. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, Native women continued to be active in community life in both Brothertown and Stockbridge. While in the nineteenth century, women’s roles in both tribes hewed more closely to the domestic sphere, more recently women have served on tribal councils, held formal leadership roles, and been particularly active in education.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> See Kallie M Kosc, “Daughters of the Nation: Stockbridge Mohican Women, Education, and Citizenship in Early America, 1790-1840” (Doctoral dissertation, Texas Christian University, 2019), 199.

fact, when conducting research for this dissertation, my interactions have all been with women: Courtney Cottrell serves as the Brothertown Tribal Historic Preservation Officer while Bonney Huntley holds the same position for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. Yvette Malone is the head librarian at the Arvid E. Miller Memorial Library and Museum, the tribal archive of the Stockbridge-Munsee, while Brothertown member Megan Fulopp maintains an active web presence for the Brothertown, including an online library of historical documents. Their activism underscores the fact that Native women continue to impact tribal development and seek to expand indigenous influence in American society. In Mexico, the legacy of indigenous women's leadership through membership in Christian Indian communities is slightly harder to track: although some convents in Mexico survived long enough to reformulate themselves after the turn of the century, when Porfirio Díaz relaxed some of the laws against convents, none of the indigenous communities were able to do so.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, by the mid-twentieth century the histories of the Indian nuns began to re-emerge, and the Cacicas' Convent, in particular, is celebrated in Oaxaca. The building itself has been transformed into a cultural center where children can take classes in music and art.

In analyzing the rise and fall of Native women's activism as members of Christian Indian communities, therefore, I do not mean to suggest that the overall trajectories of indigenous women's lives became better or worse. Instead, I have sought to identify specific strategies used by indigenous women that increased and then eventually declined in effectiveness. Most importantly, I have tried to determine why indigenous women

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Chowning, *Rebellious Nuns: The Troubled History of a Mexican Convent, 1752-1863* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 267.

might have joined Christian Indian communities, and how they used membership in those communities to assert their own desires and needs.

Throughout this dissertation, I have also attempted to demonstrate the benefits of comparative historical analysis, especially the ways that studying apparently disparate lives simultaneously can bring to light commonalities that extend beyond the boundaries of empire, ethnic identity, or religious denomination. While the patterns of individual women's lives differed, the threads of weft and warp that made up their lives often resonated across the Americas. The comparative lens of this dissertation has helped highlight the fact that Native girls in missionary-run schools used literacy tools to advocate for themselves and strengthen indigenous networks; that indigenous men drew upon European concepts of gender to argue for the creation of Christian Indian spaces; and that indigenous women used membership in Christian Indian communities to expand their sphere of influence and advocate for themselves and people of their tribes and ethnicities. Nevertheless, while history is the story of the entangled lives of many individuals, each person also has their own story, unique in its details and experiences. As a gesture of respect for the women whose lives I have studied, therefore, the final stories in this dissertation will serve as a reminder of the differences in the lives of two women who were both heavily impacted by the decline of Christian Indian communities, María del Carmen Martínez and Electa Quinney. In the end, their stories are their own.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Biographical information on Martínez from: "Las que vivan..." undated [circa 1867], AHAAO, Gobierno/Religiosos/573; marriage records of José Martínez and Magdalena Ramos, 8 Oct 1872 and Matías Rodríguez and Josefa Martínez, 4 Aug 1873, "Mexico Marriages, 1570-1950," familysearch.org. Biographical information on Quinney from Barnes M. Hall, *The Life of Rev. John Clark* (Carlton & Porter, 1856), <http://archive.org/details/liferevjohncclar00hallgoog>; Elizabeth Wilson, *Methodism in Eastern Wisconsin*, vol. 1 (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Conference Historical Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1937); Victoria Brown, *Uncommon Lives of Common Women: The Missing Half of Wisconsin History* (Wisconsin Feminists Project Fund, inc, 1975); Karyn Saemann, *Electa Quinney, Stockbridge Teacher* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2014).

María del Carmen Martínez was born around 1840 in Ixtlan, Oaxaca, Mexico, one of the larger Zapotec villages in the Sierra Norte Region. Her parents were named Cayetano Martínez and Petrona Vargas, and Mexican marriage records indicate she had at least two siblings, born in 1841 and 1842, who were both married at the Cathedral in Oaxaca; this also signifies that the Martínez family either moved to Oaxaca or maintained residences in both Ixtlan and Oaxaca. On February 10, 1857, María del Carmen took formal vows as a nun in the Cacicas' Convent, receiving the name Sor María Teresa de Jesús. Ten years later, when the Cacicas' Convent was closed, Sor María Teresa went to go live in the house of wealthy merchant don Juan Trapaga, along with one other nun, the much older Sor María Antonia. By 1877 Sor María Antonia had died, presumably leaving Sor María Teresa to continue her religious practices alone. In 1896, the five remaining nuns elected Sor María Teresa as their abbess. She died on March 10, 1908.

Electa Quinney was born in Stockbridge, New York, around 1798. The daughter of a long line of Stockbridge leaders, she was well-educated, attending two prestigious boarding schools in New York. Starting in 1821, she taught school in New York and, after 1829, in Wisconsin. In 1833 she married Daniel Adams, a Mohawk and Methodist pastor, and shortly thereafter the couple left Stockbridge and moved to Missouri. Ten years later, Adams died, but as Quaker missionaries noted, Electa continued leading prayer services for her family. In 1845, she married Cherokee newspaper editor John Walker Candy and moved with him to Seneca territory in Oklahoma. Eventually, they moved back to Stockbridge, where her children were actively involved in the debate over the Stockbridge becoming US citizens. Electa's name appears on a list of those who sought citizenship, but otherwise her opinion is not recorded; her participation in tribal political issues apparently declined. Widowed a second time in 1868, Electa died in Wisconsin in 1885.

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[HC – HSL] Haverford College  
*Henry Simmons Letterbook*

[ISA] Indiana State Archives  
*Dean Family Papers*

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (Mexico City)  
*Archivo Histórico/Fondo Franciscano*

Massachusetts Historical Society  
*Gideon Hawley Letters, 1754-1807*  
*Miscellaneous Bound Manuscripts*  
*Society for Propagating the Gospel Foundation Records*

National Archives (Washington, DC)  
*Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs*

New England Historic Genealogical Society  
*Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and Parts*  
*Adjacent in America manuscripts*  
*Rudi Ottery Papers*

[NYSA] New York State Archives  
*Brothertown Papers, 1788-1810*  
*Entry documentation submitted by the Indian Commissioner for annuities*  
*paid to the Indians, 1796-1925*  
*Original Indian Treaties and Deeds*  
*Petitions, correspondence, and reports relating to Indians, 1783-1831*  
*Recorded Indian Deeds/Treaties*

[NL] Newberry Library  
*Edward E. Ayer Manuscript Collection*

Rhode Island Historical Society  
*Paul Campbell Research Notes*  
*Shepley Collection*

Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University  
*William Lane Griswold Papers*

Yale Indian Project Papers  
*Digital Collections*

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