Indian Women of Early Mexico

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Activist or Adulteress?

The Life and Struggle of Doña Josefa María of Tepoztlan

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On July 23, 1712, the *receptor*[1] don Francisco Capellón y Espinosa and six constables made their way to an aging two-story house crammed behind an *obraje* (textile workshop) in the Monserrate district of Mexico City. The viceroy had instructed them to find and arrest a Nahua woman named Josefa María and an indigenous man named Miguel Francisco, both from Tepoztlan in the Cuernavaca region, who were accused of living together "in unchaste friendship." What little light was left in the summer sky was too weak to penetrate the narrow street as the Spaniards drew near their destination at about 9:00 P.M. Having picked out the appropriate doorway in the twilight, the officers unceremoniously burst into the house, where they discovered the naked Josefa and Miguel sleeping together on a rude bed under a single white blanket. The pair leaped up in alarm but were quickly apprehended and forced to dress themselves. When questioned by an interpreter who had accompanied the arresting party, Josefa admitted that the man, whom she called Miguel de Santiago, was not her husband but added that they slept together because there was just one blanket in the house. Continuing to speak for both, she claimed they were in Mexico City because of some litiga-

tion connected with the internal affairs of Tepoztlan. But an upstairs neighbor named Matias Francisco, who had been attracted by the noise, eagerly told the receptor that the two were indeed "living in sin" and had been jailed in the past for this crime by the *alcalde mayor* (chief magistrate) of Cuernavaca. Having heard and seen enough, Capellón marched Josefa and Miguel off to jail.[2]

It seemed to be just another sordid case of human fallibility, and this was certainly the line followed by the colonial bureaucracy. But there was really quite a bit more involved here than adultery. What the Spaniards were reluctant to admit was that Josefa, whose real name was doña Josefa María Francisca, a widowed *cacica* (ruling-class noblewoman) of Tepoztlan, located in what is now the state of Morelos, was an aggressive political activist. Along with don Miguel Francisco, a former *alcalde* (town officer), she was one of the leaders of a faction among Tepoztlan's ruling elite bent on the achievement of two goals: ending the town's obligation to send tribute workers to the mines of Taxco and removing a tyrannical governor named don Nicolás Cortés and his cohorts from municipal office. It was don Nicolás, in an effort to discredit his enemies, who had brought doña Josefa's alleged affair to the attention of the authorities in the first place. Those officials, who seemed reluctant to admit that an indigenous woman could wield any political influence, were quite willing to concentrate on the "corrupting allures" of her sex.

Modern scholars have hardly explored in any detail the possibility that Nahua women of colonial Mexico could have an overt political role, or, in other words, have some direct influence in the operation of indigenous town government. Only a few tantalizingly brief remarks about politically active native women have appeared in print. In the colonial presence of Nahua women as witnesses for testaments or as litigants, Susan Kellogg hears echoes of a precontact ideology of "gender parallelism" that allowed women—especially elite and near-elite women—to carry out overtly political functions. Both Alvis Dunn and Irene Silverblatt have suggested that during the colonial era native women could carry out overt political acts during relatively brief periods of stress. Steve J. Stern has found that indigenous women of late colonial central Mexico—including women of Tepoztlan—participated in the "public political space," most visibly in "ad hoc politics associated with emergencies" such as localized rioting.[3]

Even so, the theme of colonial political activism, and more specifically, sustained, long-term political activism, among indigenous women remains to be elaborated. As in the case of colonial Hispanic women, other aspects of indigenous women's lives have received far more scholarly attention. As a concentration on the activities of "great women" such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, La Malinche, and Isabel Moteucçoma has expanded to embrace the careful analysis of the lives of "ordinary" women of various social stations and ethnicities, we are discovering that their stories do not always conform to the "archetype" of the submissive, powerless being of social legend. Non-Hispanic women, especially those of the lower classes, could be found in a variety of occupations and as heads of households. Coupled with an ability to own and manage businesses and landholdings, their tendency to appear in court as litigants has gained a certain notoriety, above all when inheritance or property was at stake.[4] Recent studies tend to agree, however, that sooner or later the prominence of women in litigation and as property owners faded, leaving them more subordinate to men than ever before.[5]

Doña Josefa, though illiterate and unable to speak Spanish, did have real, long-term political power in eighteenth-century Tepoztlan. She was a respected ally and a feared opponent. It is true that hers is only one well-documented story, but there is every indication that she was not alone, for it is clear that other indigenous women of the Cuernavaca region engaged in distinctly political activities. In a colonial society that stereotypically considered women inferior to men and therefore barred them from public life, how had doña Josefa and these other women achieved their influence? Were indigenous males less uncomfortable with political activism by indigenous women than their Spanish contemporaries? Were there traditions in either Iberian or indigenous culture—such as an ideology of gender parallelism similar to that identified by Kellogg—that allowed women to exercise some sort of political role?

Women's Hidden Political Role

Like their contemporaries elsewhere in New Spain, Cuernavaca's Nahua women acted as market vendors, manufactured and sold pulque, textiles, and other goods, and owned property in their own

right. Female members of the elite, such as a seventeenth-century unmarried cacica of Yecapixtla named doña Inés Cortés, sometimes held large agricultural or livestock estates.[6] The jurisdiction's indigenous women went to court to protect their properties, no matter how humble or extensive; in 1694 the Cuernavacan cacica doña Felipa de Haro Bravo and two of her daughters successfully defended her dowry, bride gift, and other property from confiscation when her husband, the governor don Antonio de Hinojosa, was convicted of tribute fraud.[7]

Indeed, women were held accountable for their husbands' crimes and debts. It was not uncommon for local indigenous or Spanish authorities to jail the wife of an absent miscreant or tribute debtor. For instance, a 1607 roster of criminals in the Cuernavaca jail speaks of "Francisca Tiacapan of Quechollapa, whose spouse took some white pulque from Miguel Quauhtli, also of Quechollapa," and of the doubly unfortunate Angelina Coxcahua of Tetecala, whose spouse, "a *fiscal* [lay assistant to the priest], did not come back [from the mines of Taxco]."[8] Vigorously facing life's misfortunes, the region's indigenous women had petitions written on their behalf to complain of the unjust arrest or mistreatment of their husbands by others, or of their own abuse, and sometimes rape, at the hands of indigenous men, Spanish civilians, civil officers, and even friars and priests.[9] And when crises loomed, the region's indigenous women typically were prominent participants in *tumultos*, or localized uprisings designed to protect the town, its people, or its landholdings from some external threat.

All of this could be interpreted as conforming to the overwhelmingly "domestic" picture of native women. As litigants and even as rioters they can be seen as engaging in the defense of home, hearth, and their own and their families' integrity. But the objectives of rioting were often as much political in nature as otherwise, and there may have been more to some of these other activities than meets the eye. Though its complete veracity might be questioned, the text of a local history, written in Nahuatl, from Cuernavaca mentions that along with male elites, *illamatque*, or elder women, witnessed land boundary verifications. When more traditional kinds of sources are scrutinized, this document's implication that a tradition of feminine political influence existed in the area is bolstered by evidence that

wives and other relatives of indigenous *gobernadores* (leaders of town councils) acted as the political allies of male members of the ruling elite. In 1568, doña María Cortés, widow of Cuernavaca's conquest era *tlatoani* (ruler), don Hernando Cortés, joined forces with the town's council to force a Cortés family-owned sugar estate to pay wages to tribute laborers. Wives and sisters of a seventeenth-century governor of Xiuhtepec acted with members of the male ruling group to obtain recognition of corporate landownership, and the widow of an alcalde of Achichipico was prominent among those calling for the removal of a corrupt governor. In the adjacent Toluca Valley, the widow of a governor made an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to be allowed to complete her husband's term of office.[10]

Finally, it emerges that some petitions and some court cases involving women from a broader social spectrum had political undertones. The early 1630s were a time of internal turmoil for Cuernavaca, as the council and other prominent indigenous citizens fought the Taxco mine *repartimiento* (tribute labor obligation) and other forms of involuntary servitude, attempted to have an objectionable friar removed from the Franciscan monastery, and splintered into factions over the thorny question of legitimacy and succession in the governorship. All three struggles were interrelated (e.g., the friar was meddling in the election at the same time he was conniving with civil authorities to deliver repartimiento workers at any cost), and all three affected and brought direct action from a group of Cuernavaca's women.

In two revealing Nahuatl petitions received by the chief administrator of the semiautonomous Cortés estate, the Marquesado del Valle, a local notary recorded the complaints of a group of eleven women.[11] They asserted that an unnamed friar (in other documents we find he was the Franciscan fray Nicolás de Origuen) was mistreating them and their husbands. A grasping taskmaster, he forced young girls and boys to carry sand and stone for some repairs to the monastery. The ill-tempered religious beat three sick people, a man and two women, when they had the misfortune to come to him for some paternal comfort. The friar was not only violent, he was perverse as well. The women begged, "Do not let the maidens be instructed at the church anymore, because nothing good comes from it, for he [the friar] fornicates with them." The sly cleric also connived

with local Spaniards to gain from the absence of husbands forced to travel to the mines of Taxco. When the men were gone, the friar "deposited" their spouses in the homes of various Spaniards and the local alcalde mayor, where "all of us spun every day and all through the night. . . . At times on Sunday and feast days all of us spin . . . [and] he doesn't feed us." The women also objected to the heavy-handed activities of a church *topile* (officer) and of a fiscal, whom they claimed was an ineligible Spaniard; they requested that since "there are nobles [*pipiltin*], let one of them become fiscal." Times were tense, too, because mulatto, mestizo, and black thieves "break the doors, they destroy them; they carry away all the turkeys, the chickens, the maize, chili, squash seeds, and cotton mantles." Concluding that all this upheaval was driving people away and endangering the steady delivery of tribute, the women requested that the friar and his topile be removed.

It might be said that in speaking of their personal misfortunes, these women were merely trying to protect themselves and their families from the disruptive effects of the Taxco repartimiento, the abusive friar, and the local crime problem. But there is a distinctly political dimension to their actions as well. By stressing the disruptive nature of the corrupt friar's machinations, these women hoped to have him ejected from the *villa*'s (a Spanish urban designation) monastery and from their lives. By relating the consequences of their husbands' absence because of the repartimiento, they sought to bring that burdensome obligation to an end. These goals were shared by a faction within the cabildo for which the friar was a sworn and meddlesome enemy. In fact, these two petitions, as well as later testimony taken from some of the same women, were presented as evidence in the larger court case undertaken by the cabildo members. The female litigants were active allies of the male officers; each group was pursuing the same design in a contest in which the personal and the political were inseparably joined.

Doña Josefa's Political Career

Doña Josefa María Francisca of Tepoztlan is an almost larger-than-life example of a politically active indigenous woman. According to a male witness, doña Josefa had spent her whole life in litigation, that

it was in fact her only *oficio* (occupation).[12] Her first real appearance in the surviving record, however, came in 1705 during a protracted suit centered around the hated Taxco mine repartimiento and the wrongdoing of the Tepoztecan governor, don Nicolás Cortés. This was undoubtedly not the first time that the thirty-eight-year-old doña Josefa had been active in the political life of the town, since a former *regidor* (city councilman) stated that she "ase los tlatoles y capitanea para el pleito" (makes the speeches and leads in pursuing the litigation). In other words, she was already being recognized by friend and foe alike as an important leader of one of Tepoztlan's major political factions, accused even of personally heading an effort to collect illegal fees from the people to finance the litigation.[13]

Doña Josefa and several members of the local officer group were unsuccessful in 1705, primarily because their opponents were numerous and had the sympathy of local Spanish officials. But her faction spent twenty more years trying to end Tepoztlan's obligation to send tribute workers to Taxco and to shatter the rule of those who supported the levy, including don Nicolás Cortés and the powerful governing-class Rojas family. The Taxco levy was generally hated because it not only took men away from their homes and families for weeks at a time but was dangerous as well. Aside from the rigors of travel over bad roads, repartimiento workers were usually employed carrying heavy bags of ore out of the shafts or in stirring mercury-laced mud as part of the refining process. Injuries and mercury poisoning killed many and left others debilitated for life.

So it was in 1711 and 1712 that doña Josefa was again prominent among those continuing the fight against don Nicolás Cortés, a "loyal ally" of Spanish interests whose repeated and illegal reelection to the governorship was routinely approved by the colonial bureaucracy. Doña Josefa was by now firmly ensconced in Mexico City, having fled there sometime earlier after escaping from Cuernavaca's jail where she had been held for tribute indebtedness and adultery.[14] It was in 1712, of course, that don Nicolás successfully used the "fact" that doña Josefa and the married don Miguel Francisco were illicit lovers to have the pair arrested. Both they and several other cohorts who were apprehended at about the same time steadfastly maintained their innocence, stressing the legality of their struggle to end the iniquitous situation facing their town (and not coinciden-

tally keeping their faction from controlling the council apparatus). For a time it seemed that doña Josefa would be "deposited" (jailed) in a *recogimiento,* or house of correction for women, and in fact this was a common fate of accused adulteresses.[15] But at the end of six months, doña Josefa and don Miguel were sentenced to time already served and released with an admonishment to live peacefully and chastely in the future.

But doña Josefa did not live "peacefully," and if her detractors are to be believed, she did not abide in chastity either. In 1713, this self-styled "poor widow" brought suit against the Spanish receptor Capellón, accusing him of stealing 130 pesos from her Mexico City lodgings at the time of her arrest and of later confiscating three yokes of oxen and a mule to cover legal costs. Capellón was eventually ordered to return the money and livestock, but no record exists that this was actually done. She was not long out of the public eye; in 1720 and again in 1724, doña Josefa was one of the leaders of a faction fighting the reelection of don Nicolás de Rojas, political heir of don Nicolás Cortés (who had been murdered some years before), and, inevitably, against the continuation of the Taxco mine repartimiento.[16]

Tensions surrounding the repartimiento and the rule of don Nicolás de Rojas came to a head in the summer of 1725 when he jailed a levy of workers scheduled to go to Taxco.[17] He had been facing renewed resistance to the repartimiento since May, at which time doña Josefa and don Miguel Francisco were once more the ringleaders of the opposition. Charged with inciting the commoners to evade their tribute obligations, don Miguel and five other male *cabecillas* (leaders) of the antirepartimiento faction, but not doña Josefa, had been arrested. But when a local Spanish *teniente* (lieutenant to the alcalde mayor) tried to escort the group from Tepoztlan to the jail at Cuernavaca, his party was attacked by a large number of indigenous women and children who, pelting the Spaniards with rocks and curses, were able to free two of the prisoners.

So, on August 15, the governor don Nicolás thought he was justified in jailing a group of repartimiento workers on the eve of their departure for Taxco. This was too much for the beleaguered townspeople, who that night rose in a tumulto, attacked Tepoztlan's jail, and freed the workers (along with a small number of petty criminals and tribute debtors). Witnesses claimed that the majority of the rioters had been women, among them the spouses of the prisoners and some of the prominent opposition leaders. Rock-toting women were said to have been the most prominent besiegers of their own town officers and the local Spaniards in Tepoztlan's monastery and were among those who heaped verbal abuse on a friar who attempted to quell the rioters with peaceful words.[18]

The rioters faded away by the end of the second day, their goals apparently reached, and in the aftermath local Marquesado officers typically arrested a few men but no women. The August tumulto seemed to have been the kind of spontaneous outbreak of violence remarked elsewhere by William B. Taylor.[19] But in early September, and again later in the month, when don Nicolás de Rojas and Spanish officials twice more tried to force tributaries to go to Taxco, there was renewed rioting, again with women most in evidence. There are very strong indications that in these two outbreaks the violence was being orchestrated by a small number of people, and it is not surprising to find that doña Josefa and don Miguel Francisco were the alleged conductors. Among those arrested in the aftermath was Angelina María, the supposedly wronged wife of don Miguel Francisco. She was identified as the leader of the female rioters, at one point directing a group of one hundred women who broke into the sacristy of the monastery and stole some holy ornaments and vestments.[20] The goods, it was said, were taken to Mexico City to doña Josefa's residence in the Monserrate district, to be sold to pay for more litigation.

Showing surprising loyalty for a woman whose husband had been carrying on a notorious affair for over thirty years, Angelina denied don Miguel's or her own guilt. Yet she was the only woman to be punished for her role, initially being sentenced to a year of obraje labor followed by six months of work at an *hospital de indios* ("Indian" hospital), a sentence that was commuted in 1726 by the Audiencia to the year of imprisonment she had already endured. The sentences of the arrested men, who were threatened with a year of labor in an *hacienda de minas* (refinery) in Taxco, were similarly commuted at the same time. Doña Josefa, who seems to have coordinated events in Tepoztlan from her self-imposed exile in the Valley of Mexico, could not be located. Her supporters claimed that she was ill in a place called San Juan de Dios and had nothing to do with the tumultos. The whole truth was never discovered, nor was doña Josefa

ever again named as an active political figure in Tepoztlan. Perhaps doña Josefa, who in 1725 would have been around sixty-three years old, died of a biological enemy that no amount of litigation could defeat.

Activist or Adulteress?

Spanish officials charged with the enforcement of the Taxco repartimiento and the collection of tribute, who viewed cooperative intermediaries such as the governors don Nicolás Cortés and don Nicolás de Rojas in a favorable light, were very hostile to those who went against their aims, especially if they were uncooperative Nahuas. Heirs to almost two hundred years of experience dealing with political disputes involving indigenous men, colonial administrators and judges of the early eighteenth century generally categorized indigenous male adversaries as corrupt and irreligious troublemakers, unreliable drunkards, or persons who were too inept to hold office on an indigenous town council. When deciding guilt or innocence, though, the Spanish emphasis was less on moral or social shortcomings than on pragmatic concerns, such as the extent to which some financial malfeasance connected with tribute collection had occurred. The punishment meted out to alleged wrongdoers, if any, was further mitigated by the connections of the accused among influential Spaniards and, secondarily, prominent indigenous elites.

Colonial officials were less sure in their reactions when faced with the obvious involvement of indigenous women in cabildo affairs. They were not unaware that indigenous women had a good deal of influence in community matters, and officials and travelers sometimes remarked on the outspokenness of native women, even when their husbands were present.[21] It is true that Spain had a powerful female monarch in Isabel of Castile and that women of the high aristocracy had at one time been able to inherit lordships of towns. Local female property owners had attended town assemblies. But except for the queen, by the eve of the invasion of the Americas whatever political power women nobles wielded was largely ceremonial in nature, and town assemblies had long since been dominated by men.[22] By the early 1700s, the feminine exercise of overt political power went against the cultural values of the colonial authorities, especially if it was being exercised by a mere Nahua and in opposition to Spanish interests.

Because she was acting with men, doña Josefa was tarred with the same brush that was routinely used to discredit political miscreants. Like her male counterparts, she found that in a subtle effort to discredit the faction, Spanish notaries routinely robbed all of its members of their marks of social distinction by omitting the titles "don" and "doña" from their names. Typically, the whole faction, doña Josefa included, were in 1712 defamed by the alcalde mayor, don Tomás Pérez de la Penilla, as "in the majority seditious and riotous agitators." Spanish officials and clerics emphasized that all of the faction's members failed to pay their tribute and to attend church, and in 1712 had tried to convince the people to stop repair work on Tepoztlan's monastery church, damaged in an earthquake in August 1711.[23] A later Spanish officer excoriated don Miguel Francisco and doña Josefa for being "professional rebels" and for causing the ruin of Tepoztlan.[24]

The faction's indigenous enemies responded in a similar manner, adding details that touched more directly on the internal affairs of Tepoztlan, its government, and its people. In the great dispute of 1725, adherents of the governor don Nicolás de Rojas accused the faction of circulating an inflammatory Nahuatl document that urged Tepoztlan's indigenous citizens to resist the Taxco repartimiento and even charged them with the murder of the governor don Nicolás Cortés![25] The illegitimacy of the faction's leaders was stressed not only by omitting their noble titles from written records but also by labeling some of them as vagabonds and "outside agitators" who held no municipal office and by calling them "a bunch of troublemaking commoners." These were serious personal faults in an era when the legitimacy of one's noble lineage, spurious as it might actually have been, was becoming an ever more important criterion for admission to the active ruling groups of towns such as Tepoztlan.

When doña Josefa was treated as an individual, however, the nature of the crimes attributed to her was different from those ascribed to her male colleagues. Spanish and allied indigenous officers alike spoke of her tenacity and aggressiveness and emphasized her sexual deviance. Above all, they highlighted her alleged adulterous affair with don Miguel Francisco, which by 1725 was said to have

gone on for at least thirty years, beginning while her husband, Gregorio Francisco, had still been alive. Far from placing most of the blame on don Miguel Francisco, witnesses asserted that the aggressive doña Josefa had corrupted him. Judges were treated to descriptions of the pair being discovered at five in the morning drunkenly cavorting in a carnal embrace. Nahua witnesses alleged that the pair failed to attend church because of their "evil friendship" and that they had begun their endless litigation in the first place only to save themselves from punishment for their sexual misdeeds. Doña Josefa was called a "depraved" woman acting only to further her lover's career. She was "the worst of the accused," the "most seditious of those who insist on unrest." She led wives to "work against their husbands" and was even an unfit mother. According to her own son, who was not a member of his mother's faction, she had threatened to put him in an obraje if he refused to go along with the effort to bring an end to the Taxco repartimiento. At the close of the 1712 adultery case, a Spanish fiscal attached to the Audiencia summed it all up when he said that doña Josefa was "a discredit to her sex."[26]

In Spanish society from at least the twelfth century, one of the main ways a woman was discredited was to call her sexual conduct into question, and charges that an erring woman was an adulterer were common; much later, Spanish lay and religious authorities continued to regard sexual deviance as "dangerous to the social order."[27] In colonial New Spain, punishments for female adulterers are reported to have been harsher than those for men.[28] This double standard was clearly in operation in doña Josefa's case. Not only was don Miguel Francisco excused from much of the blame because doña Josefa had supposedly led him on, her longtime adversary don Nicolás de Rojas escaped any censure or punishment despite the fact that he was repeatedly accused of publicly keeping a mistress in Tepoztlan, a plebeian woman who made and sold the alcoholic beverage called *tepache* in her home.[29] This was a far cry from the direct action taken when an indigenous woman who had become too active in politics was arrested and tried for a similar offense.

Even without her reputed sexual promiscuity, doña Josefa's forceful involvement in her community's political affairs and her alleged failures as a mother were enough to win her censure. Other women who left the "normal" bounds of feminine behavior but who

were not accused of sexual crimes, such as Angelina María and those involved in the riots of the summer and fall of 1725, were treated to similar forms of character assassination. Witnesses emphasized their aggressiveness, their violent use of rocks, and their tendency to employ shockingly foul language to intimidate. For instance, a Spanish *maestre de escuela* (schoolteacher) claimed that during the course of the rioting a group of indigenous women came to his home and taunted his wife with foul and abusive language. A Spanish resident named doña Francisca de la Bera y Zapata reported that native women, speaking in loud voices, cried that they were going to burn down the schoolteacher's house as well as the houses of all the other *gente de razón* (Spaniards) in Tepoztlan. The "violent tempered" wife of one of the men being sent to Taxco was said to have attacked and to have torn out a hank of hair from the head of an indigenous *alguacil* (constable) who had been sent to get him.[30]

All of these women violated Spanish gender ideology about the proper comportment of women. At least on a utopian plane, it was totally unacceptable for women, above all noblewomen, to be unchaste, aggressive, violent, stubborn, and overly proud. It is true that women could be active in a relatively wide variety of commercial and even managerial activities and that widows generally had more freedom of action than married women. But their distinct status in relation to men of the same social class was never forgotten. Enshrined in a series of manuals and instruction books written mainly by ecclesiastics, noblewomen, especially, were to be virginal, pious, shy, and obsequious. They were to be skilled administrators of the household and conspicuous in the accomplishment of charitable work.[31] The extent to which Spanish women of any class conformed to these ideals is being questioned, but when confronted with the actions of someone like doña Josefa these notions were certainly in the minds of colonial officials and others inculcated with such values.

Among the latter, presumably, were members of Tepoztlan's indigenous ruling group. But they reacted against the activism of some of Tepoztlan's women from more than just a Hispanic perspective. It is quite possible that older, precontact Nahua traditions still made themselves felt, especially elements that were not dissimilar to the social teachings of the conquerors. Recent insights into what is being seen as gender parallelism among the Nahua (including those offered

by several contributors to this volume) notwithstanding, and though one must be somewhat skeptical of the possibly Spanish Catholic-influenced information provided to the sixteenth-century ethnographer fray Bernardino de Sahagún by his elite male informants, it is clear that the precontact Nahua had an elaborate gender ideology that included specific ideal traits for both women and men of various types and social levels. The *Florentine Codex* preserves very detailed expectations for women, including noblewomen. "Good" noblewomen were not surprisingly those who were dignified, honorable, and modest. A good noblewoman was a protective person, "one who loves, who guards people," a tender person who was "humble, appreciative, . . . irreproachable, faultless."[32]

Clearly, as far as her colonial indigenous enemies were concerned, doña Josefa was none of these things. Many of the *Florentine Codex*'s descriptions of the "bad noblewoman" read surprisingly like the later anti-doña Josefa rhetoric emanating from members of Tepoztlan's ruling group. To them, this aggressive, troublemaking adulteress who led men into ruin and caused revolt among the people would have more easily fit the conquest era images of the "bad noblewoman" who was "violent, furious, savage, revolting, . . . irresponsible, irritable, excitable." She "incites riots, she arouses fear, implants fear, spreads fear, . . . she impels fight, causes havoc among people." Just like doña Josefa, a bad noblewoman "introduces one into error," she is "a spreader of hatred, . . . arrogant, unchaste, lewd, debauched, . . . a perverted woman."[33] And like the more generalized "evil woman" of the *Florentine Codex*, doña Josefa would have been seen as a "carnal woman . . . who finds pleasure in her body. . . . Wheresoever she seduces . . . she brings him to ruin. The scandalous woman is an adulteress."[34]

The fact remains that in spite of such traditions, regardless of all the crimes and moral vices attributed to doña Josefa, some members of the indigenous ruling group were not opposed to her political activities. She was, after all, accepted as an ally and leader by a faction composed primarily of male members of the town's indigenous elite. She did not owe her influence to her extramarital affair with don Miguel Francisco but rather to her own ability. A male ally spoke of her in admiring terms in 1712, stating that the cacica "through her solicitude and hard work has induced the people to gather together the money necessary to pay for the divine cult of the church and for the costs of litigation."[35] Why were these indigenous attitudes different from those of the Spaniards and their indigenous allies in Tepoztlan, who honored the gender ideology of the conquerors, at least in the breach?

Perhaps the key lies ultimately in the different traditions of Nahua and Spaniard. An increasing volume of work looking beyond the narrow confines of the conquest era is showing that indigenous ways were not completely obliterated by the vicissitudes of colonialism and that many persisted, if in a modified form, for a very long time. If the *Florentine Codex* is to be trusted, pre-Hispanic Nahua culture may not have been entirely closed to the political activities of elite women. It is true that when the training of elite women is described, only domestic skills such as weaving and preparing food are emphasized.[36] This same sort of "domestic" orientation is quite evident in chronicles such as those written by the Texcoco mestizo noble Juan Bautista Pomar and in composite histories composed by such Spaniards as José de Acosta, fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinia), and Francisco Javier Clavijero. The so-called Bancroft Dialogues, a *huehuetlatolli*, or Nahuatl-language socialization manual containing a good deal of information about social conventions of apparent preconquest origin, refers to husbands as the "heads and trunks" of wives and lists the kinds of things all women, including noblewomen, were expected to learn: "The girls were taught all the different things women do: sweeping, sprinkling, preparing food, making beverages, grinding [maize], preparing tortillas, making tamales, all the different things customarily done among women; also [the art of] the spindle and the weaver's reed and various kinds of embroidery; also dyeing, how rabbit down or rabbit fur was dyed different colors."[37]

Using this kind of source, some modern researchers have concluded that though elite women could have a ceremonial role in religion, they were completely excluded from public office and other political activities and had rights inferior to those of noblemen.[38] Miguel León-Portilla believes that although there is some evidence that women could act as professional notaries, their "supreme mission" was to bring men into the world.[39]

But other scholars of the precontact era are asserting that elite

women had more centrality in the political scheme of the central Mexican state.[40] Susan D. Gillespie, while not identifying any truly independent governing capacity for Mexica noblewomen, clearly establishes their crucial role in dynastic succession and political legitimacy. Silvia Garza Tarazona de González believes that the portrayal of Coyolxauhqui at the head of the "400 rabbits" is symbolic of a leadership role for women, and she reminds us that one of the four leaders of the wandering Mexica was a woman named Chimalma. She also cites *Relaciones geográficas* from Justlahuaca, Mistepeque, Ayusuchiquilazala, Xicayan and Putla, Zacatepeque, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, the central plateau of Mexico, and the Huasteca as indicating that women assumed the role of governors or leaders and states that these sources show that the practice may have been more widespread. Finally, she refers to a recently discovered relief in Mexico City showing a female ruler of Culhuacan, garbed for war, being vanquished by Tezcatlipoca, perhaps standing for the conquest of Culhuacan by the Mexica under Moteucçoma Ilhuicamina.[41] Pedro Carrasco mentions two "queens," including Atotoztli, daughter of Moteucçoma Ilhuicamina, who briefly succeeded her father, and records a line from a *probanza* (petition) of doña Isabel Moteucçoma, daughter of the second Moteucçoma, which stated that "if there were no males who were close relations and most worthy, females could succeed to the rulership."[42] Susan Kellogg believes that Mexica women may have had some kind of judicial role, such as that of "marketplace directors," enjoyed a measure of authority in craft guilds, in the *cuicalli*, or house of song, as priestesses in temples, and as *cihuatepixque*, or female ward heads, and may have had a measure of power at even higher political levels. Kellogg believes, as well, that the Nahua tendency to describe rulers as the "fathers and mothers" of the people meant that "both the male and female aspects of parenting were deemed necessary for adequate leadership." In the Cuernavaca region, including Tepoztlan, the description of male town leaders as "fathers and mothers" continued well into the colonial era.[43]

Direct evidence of this propensity to link political authority (in real and symbolic terms) to both genders can be found in some of the standard postconquest native-language accounts. The Bancroft Dialogues, in a section containing conventions of discourse surrounding

the marriage of a ruler, contains language that implies some kind of political role for rulers' spouses. Speaking of the awaited arrival of a newly wed female consort, the text has the ruler say, "Let me quickly hear word from them how a party will come to bring the lady our sister to come to govern her city and occupy [her? its?] throne, where it will come to fruition that she will console me, and her [little] brothers-in-law and sisters [sisters-in-law] and her vassals will be looking up to her."[44]

Moreover, there are some suggestive phrases in the *Florentine Codex*'s description of "good" noblewomen that allude to some kind of acceptable leadership or political role. Apparently unaware that they seemed to be contradicting themselves, the elite male informants told the friar that as well as being modest, chaste, and humble, it was acceptable for "good" noblewomen to be "vigorous, . . . fierce, stern." Aside from their role as exemplars, "good" elite women were characterized as "valiant, having valor, bravery, courage." Even more to the point, and using many of the same terms applied to male rulers, a worthy elite woman "governs, leads, provides for one, arranges well, administers peacefully. . . . The noblewoman [is] a woman ruler [*cioatlatoani*], governor, leader. . . . The good woman ruler [is] a provider of good conditions, a corrector, a punisher, a chastiser, a reprimander. She is heeded, obeyed; she creates order; she establishes rules."[45]

Had doña Josefa's enemies been familiar with the *Codex*, they would have argued that she may have tried to govern, but she did not "provide good conditions" or "create order." Yet here is a rationale, however submerged in a much larger array of "traditional" feminine roles and attributes, for some sort of precontact female political power.

Conclusion

Doña Josefa, other women active in the resistance to the Taxco repartimiento and in seventeenth-century Cuernavacan efforts to rid themselves of a troublesome priest, and indigenous wives who spoke forthrightly in public, even in the presence of husbands, may well have been heirs to similar traditions. Yet in the precontact era, there seem to have been many strictures facing politically active women.

Postconquest indigenous women of New Spain, such as doña Josefa, were caught in a double bind in their relation to the colonial state. They were considered fundamentally subordinate by Spaniards because they were not only "Indians" but female as well. No matter that doña Josefa was a cacica, it was simply not acceptable for her to become involved directly in governmental affairs in opposition to her overlord's interests. Rather than legitimize her political role by prosecuting her in the same way as politically active indigenous males, they chose to attack her honor and femininity by emphasizing her supposed failures as a woman.

A more ambivalent attitude was present among Tepoztlan's indigenous ruling group. Some of the Tepoztecan elite, adherents of what may have been an alternative gender ideology that held open the possibility for elite women's political participation, welcomed the able leadership of the astute doña Josefa. But others, by now heavily influenced by Spanish ideals of femininity, saw in doña Josefa's alleged leadership in the tumultos, her supposed violent and forceful nature, and her purported sexual promiscuity an unacceptable challenge to the colonial status quo. They were unwilling to admit that an indigenous noblewoman could have a legitimate political role, especially if such a denial would further their own partisan goals. So they labeled her a common, aggressive, morally corrupt woman, an unfit mother, and one who worked to set wife against husband and so destroy the very fiber of family life. Even the conquest era informants of Sahagún, as well as the recorders of huehuetlatolli, who already may have been feeling the weight of Spanish social teachings and gender ideology, had nearly obscured in a plethora of "domestic" rhetoric the possibility that a Nahua noblewoman could enjoy some sort of political influence.

Still, in Tepoztlan, in Cuernavaca, and elsewhere, there was a possibility for indigenous women to participate in the political life of their communities, a product of precontact tradition and the pressured atmosphere of the colonial era. Under Spanish rule, communities such as Tepoztlan were faced with mounting threats to their physical survival when a distant government could decree that a significant percentage of the local male population had to be absent every week from their families and fields to participate in the repartimiento and when corrupt indigenous officers who nonetheless

abetted Spanish interests were maintained in power through the influence of local Spanish officials and clergy. Firmly rooted in older traditions, the ability of doña Josefa and other similar women to rise to political action seems to have occurred in a partial vacuum of male legitimacy, when traditional heads of household were missing and when elites who had "sold out" to the Spanish held official sway.[46]

The extent to which doña Josefa's larger-than-life leadership role was an aberration remains to be tested by studies of other times and places. One thing is very clear. Doña Josefa may have been an adulteress, but she was above all else an activist struggling against the twin burdens of restrictive gender and racial ideologies to be heard.