

Two Bigamists in Tehuantepec: Global(ized) Itineraries in Southern Mesoamerica, circa 1600

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Abstract This article compares the itineraries of two men—one European, one Mesoamerican—accused of bigamy at the turn of the seventeenth century. While the European repeatedly remade his life in new locales, the Mesoamerican returned to the same places time and again, revealing a pattern of circular migration by multilingual Oaxacans along the southern Pacific coast. The European's travels enabled his manipulation of the Spanish Inquisition, while the Mesoamerican's expanding social geography became his undoing. Reading these two cases in tandem pushes us beyond their apparent similarities, a product of their framing by the Spanish Catholic legal system, and toward their profound incommensurability despite overlaps of time, place, and circumstance.

Perhaps they would never release him. It was 1591, nearly 20 years since Gaspar Pérez, an Indigenous native of Huamelula, Oaxaca, had left his hometown. His parents had long ago returned to the earth, as had his wife Ana's parents and so many of their brothers and sisters. Now, he had been locked in the Spanish jail of Santiago de Guatemala as a bigamist for over a year. Where were his defenders, especially the church scribe from nearby Ciudad Vieja who had arranged his second marriage in the first place? What would happen to him, and to Margarita, if he was found guilty?

While Gaspar hoped for better days, a young Spaniard, Dionisio de Vargas, was helping his mother move from their home in Seville to Mexico City. She was impatient; all six of her children now lived in the Americas, and life in Europe reminded her of past betrayals. Reassuringly, Dionisio had already crossed the Atlantic several times. He was only 22 years old, unmarried and eager. He could not have imagined the full extent of his future travels, nor how his mother would one day help save him from charges of bigamy made by old friends.

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Gaspar and Dionisio never crossed paths, but their stories run parallel in more ways than one. The Zapotec capital of Tehuantepec—a Mesoamerican market center, Spanish shipyard, and developing cattle region—was the geographical center of their travels. Like many early modern bigamists, both men justified their second marriages by claiming to have heard through others that their first wives had died. Both sought not just companionship but the joys, obligations, and commitment of family, recalling Richard Boyer's observation that, ironically, many New Spanish bigamists seemed more than anything to want to follow the rules, fit in, and settle down. Both, again recalling Boyer, found themselves trapped in a flow of information they could not fully control.¹

Their itineraries, however, tell contrasting tales. While mobility was a key precondition for most bigamy cases at the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century, the European Dionisio stands out for having secretly traveled to Italy to denounce himself to the Roman Inquisition in order to avoid prosecution in New Spain. Bigamy trials like the Mesoamerican Gaspar's are scarce in and of themselves, given the removal of the Indigenous population from the Inquisition's jurisdiction in 1571 and the Catholic Church's preoccupation at the time with what it considered Indigenous idolatry. Beyond its archival rarity, however, Gaspar's case is unusual for suggesting not only his own circular migration between Oaxaca and Guatemala but that of an entire Mesoamerican community.

Reading these two remarkable dossiers in tandem underscores not only the "simultaneity of stories-so-far" and "throwntogetherness" of which early modern globalization consisted but the extreme disparity of the stakes involved.² The similarities between the two cases are deceptive, and the differences are crucial. Imperialism presented both men with risk and opportunity. Social networks simultaneously enabled and endangered their livelihoods. Their worlds expanded—but while Dionisio repeatedly attempted to recenter his life and leave certain parts behind (and, in doing so, helped extend European power across two oceans), Gaspar and the other Mesoamericans in his story exhibited little sense of reinvention or attempt to escape the past. Their world had become a slippery shatter zone: not merely neutral space through which globalizing goods and people circulated, but actively, violently globalized. For Mesoamerican survivors at the end of the sixteenth century, individual

1. Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists*, 32, 165–218.

2. Massey, *For Space*, 54, 141.

itineraries in pursuit of well-being responded to unavoidable and often painful realities. Their movements also helped stitch the world back together.³

From Oaxaca to Guatemala and Back Again: Gaspar Pérez

Gaspar Pérez was born in the 1560s in San Pedro Huamelula, a Pacific coastal town of mostly Chontal speakers and a center of Spanish colonial and ecclesiastical administration.⁴ Gaspar served as an altar boy (*teopantaca*) in the local Catholic church and in 1576 married a local Indigenous girl named Ana in a Catholic ceremony. Their daughter Isabel was only 18 months old when Gaspar left Huamelula, though perhaps not very far or permanently. Six years later he was “still living” in Atotonilco, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Tehuantepec approximately two days’ travel west from Huamelula (2v). There, in 1584, Gaspar met with Gaspar López, a Nahuatl church scribe from Ciudad Vieja, Guatemala, a large colony of recently arrived Mexicanos, a generalizing moniker that in Central America included Nahuatl and Otomí from central Mexico and Zapotec from Tehuantepec who had invaded Central America in the 1520s alongside the Spanish. Gaspar and López may have already known each other; Gaspar testified that López “went there [to Atotonilco] to get me and he spoke to me about getting married” to a woman named Margarita, of Acolhua descent from Texcoco (3r). Gaspar agreed. The following year, he and Margarita were formally presented to one another in a food- and flower-laden ceremony arranged by Ciudad Vieja’s church steward and a group of town elders (*ytahuan*). Immediately afterward, Gaspar traveled “to the coast,” possibly as part of a prenuptial period of fasting and celibacy (2v). He returned to Ciudad Vieja one week later

3. I borrow “slippery” from Louise Burkhart to mean fraught with unanticipated dangers and possibilities, and “shatter zone” from Northern Native American studies. See Burkhart, *Slippery Earth*, 58–59; Ethridge, “Introduction,” 42–45. Stitching the world back together is inspired by Tim Ingold’s discussion of “wayfaring,” “meshwork,” and ancestral knowledge as something gained “along the path” rather than transmitted. Ingold, *Being Alive*, 145–64.

4. All information and quotations pertaining to Pérez’s case come from “Contra Gaspar Pérez, indio preso en la carcel del corte, sobre que le acusa ser casado dos veces siendo viva la primer muger,” 1589, Archivo General de Centro América, Guatemala City (hereafter cited as AGCA), A1.15, leg. 4084, exp. 32406. I am grateful to John Sullivan for permission to use his translation of all Nahuatl portions of this document; see John Sullivan, trans., “Imputación de bigamia contra Gaspar Pérez,” Nahuatl/Nawat in Central America, last modified 30 Mar. 2016, <http://nahuatl-nawat.org/items/show/5>. Sergio Romero and Kelly McDonough offered additional translations and comments. The specific folio for subsequent quotations of this document will be given parenthetically.

to be married to Margarita by the town's Franciscan priest in the presence of the scribe López, the church steward, and two members of the Mexicano town council. Additional witnesses came from Oaxaca, one from the majority Nahuatl (Pochutec) port town of Huatulco west of Huamelula, the other identified only as a Mixtec.

Four years later, a Spaniard named Juan Rodríguez arrived in Ciudad Vieja and denounced Gaspar Pérez as a bigamist to the town's Franciscan prior. This posed difficulties not only for Gaspar and Margarita but also for Ciudad Vieja's governor and cabildo. Gaspar was imprisoned and exhorted "not to lie, to speak and answer truthfully from his heart about being married there in his hometown Quauhvimilollan as the witnesses have said. If he speaks the entire truth, God will favor him. But if not, the devil will take his soul" (2v). The Mexicanos of Ciudad Vieja protested their own innocence: "Four years ago when he married in our city we did not know if he was already married there in his hometown. . . . No one anywhere knew" (3v). Gaspar, too, adopted a contrite tone in his testimony given in Nahuatl to the Ciudad Vieja officials. He did not deny the charge. "When I came to Guatemala, I say in all truth that I was confused, the devil confused me: I did it under those circumstances," he said. "I acknowledge that it was my, Gaspar Pérez's, fault. I was confused and I sinned against the holy church" (3r).

The Mexicano officials subsequently received testimony in Nahuatl from five migrants to the Suchitepéquez coast from Huamelula, all under 30 years of age. They claimed that Gaspar's first wife, Ana, was alive in Huamelula and had an infant boy in addition to daughter Isabel, now married. The first witness, Gaspar's brother-in-law Sebastián Fabián, had lived next door to Gaspar and Ana in Huamelula and had arrived in Guatemala the previous year.⁵ His testimony was emphatic: "I am telling the absolute truth; I'm neither just making empty accusations nor concealing my intentions. I know for a fact that he is married there in his hometown. And I'm not the only one who knows" (1v).

The second witness, Juan Bautista, had left Huamelula six years prior and was living and married in the town of Miahuatlán, on Guatemala's coastal plain. He traveled to Ciudad Vieja with the express purpose of accusing Gaspar, and he echoed his friend Sebastián Fabián's testimony: "I know Gaspar Pérez well, for he is a person from my hometown. It's all the same city and we came from there. And his father's name is Tomás Tumich, and his mother's name is Ana

5. "No nicmelaua cā uel [c]ē tochinamitl yuā çan ce solar oquipanau i yn ompa nochan ca uel niquixmati" (1v; Only one house plot separates him from my house, for I know him well). On Mesoamerican households, see Granicka, "Family Relations"; Cline, *Book of Tributes*, 34–69; Sousa, "Women and Crime."

Dauch. I know everything. . . . I'm speaking the truth; I'm not just making empty accusations. May God help him" (2r). Additionally, Juan Bautista presented the Mexicano officials with an inquiry conducted by the Mesoamerican authorities of nearby Xicalapa, a coastal town one day's walk from Miahuatlán.⁶ The Xicalapa inquiry, also in Nahuatl, presented testimony from three more Huamelulans who had left their hometown within the previous four years. They repeated in brief and formulaic terms that Gaspar's first wife, Ana, and her two children were alive and well.

The officials of Ciudad Vieja then handed Gaspar over to the criminal court of the Audiencia de Guatemala.⁷ He was appointed a Spanish *curador y defensor de indios* for his hearing in front of the Spanish *corregidor* and was later represented before the audiencia's judges by a *procurador de pobres*. Both argued that there was no proof of the witnesses' testimony, that Gaspar's confession had been prompted by the Mexicano officials, and that more witnesses could verify that Gaspar's first wife had died. Gaspar himself provided a new, predictable explanation: that 11 years after he had left Huamelula, "some Indians" from there had said that his first wife had died (9v).

The case dragged on for 15 months, the procurador repeatedly asking for time to locate witnesses while Gaspar languished in prison. In a grim ending to his surely miserable detention, Gaspar was stripped to the waist, bound hand and foot, paraded atop a mule through Santiago accompanied by a crier announcing his crime, administered 200 lashes in the central plaza, and sold at public auction into servitude for six years—a harsh punishment to be sure, but not atypical for the crime of bigamy at the end of the sixteenth century.⁸

6. Xicalapa's encomendero was Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo de Medrano, son of the conquistador Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo; Cabrillo de Medrano was also twice town magistrate of Santiago de Guatemala and owner of a cattle ranch along the road connecting Xicalapa to Miahuatlán. This may be the Spaniard Juan Rodríguez who originally denounced Gaspar.

7. On ecclesiastical versus civil law and the late sixteenth-century Provisorato de Indios in Guatemala, see Chiquín Enriquez, "Administrar la justicia"; Cunill, *Los defensores de indios*.

8. Ana de Zaballa Beascochea argues that the relative cruelty of punishments administered by New Spain's ecclesiastical courts for crimes like bigamy depended not on ethnicity but on the particular era's legislation; see Zaballa Beascochea, "Del Viejo al Nuevo Mundo," 46. In 164 cases from Seville between 1559 and 1648, bigamists typically received sentences of 100 lashes and no more than six years of galley service; see Perry, *Gender and Disorder*, 70–72. In Galicia between 1560 and 1700, 73 percent of those convicted served in the galleys, usually for three to five years although sometimes for as many as ten, and 80 percent received between 200 and 300 lashes; see Contreras, *El Santo Oficio*, 565. Boyer gives the typical punishment in New Spain as 100 to 200 lashes and five to

Seven Times along the Ocean: Dionisio de Vargas

Dionisio de Vargas was the son of a bar cutter at Seville's Casa de Moneda.⁹ In the early 1580s at the age of 18, he trailed four older brothers to the mining region of Zacatecas, Mexico. In 1590, he helped his widowed mother, Ana de Avilés, and six-year-old niece move from Seville to Mexico City.¹⁰ With much of the family now residing in New Spain, in 1593 Dionisio migrated to the Philippines and by 1595 had married a young Spanish Manilan named María de Mercado. Their wedding guests included Antonio de Morga, the recently arrived lieutenant governor who in the future would be judge of Manila, head of the Audiencia de México's criminal court, and president of the Audiencia de Quito.¹¹

Five years later, however, Dionisio returned to Mexico alone. He claimed to have left "with employment" on the galleons *Santa Margarita* and *San Gerónimo*, which in 1600 shipwrecked and lost the entirety of their cargo; only a few on board survived (3r). Dionisio may have been a merchant's agent responsible for a shipment of goods aboard the galleons.¹² "In order that his poverty not be known," he later told inquisitors in Mexico City, he traveled to Sonsonate in Central America, changed his name to Juan Bautista de Vargas, and worked as

seven years in the galleys; see Boyer, *Lives of the Bigamists*, 232. María Asunción Herrera Sotillo observes that exile or forced service was reserved for the most serious cases; see reference and discussion in Chuchiak, *Inquisition in New Spain*, 155, 169, 219.

9. Unless otherwise noted, all information and quotations pertaining to Vargas's case come from "Documents and Letters Pertaining to Charges of Bigamy against Dionisio de Vargas," 29 July 1608–25 Nov. 1610, Newberry Library, Chicago, Edward E. Ayer Collection, MS 1248. The specific folio for subsequent quotations of this document will be given parenthetically.

10. "Expediente de concesión de licencia para pasar a Nueva España a favor de Ana de Avilés," 1588, Archivo General de Indias, Seville (hereafter cited as AGI), Indiferente 2064, no. 86; "Expediente de concesión de licencia para pasar a México a favor de Ana de Avilés," 1590, AGI, Indiferente 2065, no. 18.

11. Dionisio first migrated to the Philippines on the ship of Juan de Zamudio, who defended Formosa against the Japanese in 1597 and helped initiate trade relations with the Chinese; Morga, *Sucesos*, 39r, 52v–60r; "Capítulo de carta de Tello sobre viaje de Zamudio," 1601, AGI, Filipinas 6, ramo 9, no. 174.

12. "Carta de la Audiencia de Manila sobre materias de gobierno," 1601, AGI, Filipinas 19, ramo 2, no. 21, fol. 1r–v; García et al., "Atmospheric Circulation Changes"; and data set available on p. 52 at "Transcriptions of Documentary Information Relevant to the Voyages of the Manila Galleons, from the Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain. (Two Tables, in Spanish)," National Center for Environmental Information, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, last modified 5 Oct. 2006, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/pub/data/paleo/historical/pacific/acapulco-manila.pdf>. See also Hoberman, *Mexico's Merchant Elite*; Bjork, "Link That Kept the Philippines Spanish," 42–45; Escalante Arce, *Códice Sonsonate*, 2:33–53.

a goldsmith and silversmith until 1607, when he heard from an unnamed Spaniard from Manila that María de Mercado had died (3v).

Seeking confirmation, Dionisio headed north to Tehuantepec and worked there for one year, during which time an acquaintance from Manila named Francisco Gallegos, now resident in Chiapas, claimed to have attended María de Mercado's funeral. Dionisio began courting Beatriz Marín Cortés, the daughter of Spanish residents of Tehuantepec Juan Marín Cortés and Ana Rodríguez Saravia. In nearby Antequera (present-day Oaxaca city) he sought out two more acquaintances he had known in Manila who now lived in Oaxaca, the cleric Diego de Paz Monterrey and one Francisco Xuarez. Both assured him that María de Mercado had died. Dionisio then solicited written confirmation of his first wife's death and consent to remarry from the Oaxaca cathedral's provisor. He returned to Tehuantepec, where he and Beatriz got married in February 1608 and entered the required waiting period for the ecclesiastical blessing of their union.¹³

Their peace of mind was brief. Twenty days later, on his way to buy textiles in Puebla for the Marín hacienda, Dionisio received a letter from his mother in Mexico City warning her son not to finalize the nuptials:

Son of an unfortunate mother, in recent days I have [sent you] some letters from doña María de Mercado that will serve you as proof . . . the viceroy has a petition that Diego Ruíz de Ayala [a member of the Manila cabildo] gave him stating that wherever you might be these letters should be sent to you, and he had heard about this [matter] from a man who . . . came from Manila with you and . . . saw you some three months ago and told [Ruíz de Ayala] everything you had told him, which made Diego Ruíz very angry, and he swore that he would find you. (19r)

A second letter advised Dionisio of no fewer than 50 letters awaiting him from María de Mercado.¹⁴

13. "Se cassó con ella despossándose aunque no se veló" (4r). On the waiting period between a church wedding (*in facie ecclesiae*) and final consecration (*bendiciones nupciales*), see Rodríguez Sánchez, "El poder familiar," 370.

14. The archive casts only the faintest shadow of María de Mercado; we cannot even be certain that her letters existed. On early modern Iberian women's assertion of themselves through writing, often through a notary, see Beck, "Women's Power and Material Exchange"; Cruz and Hernández, *Women's Literacy*, esp. Bergmann, "Learning at Her Mother's Knee?"; Howe, *Education and Women*; Mena García, "Más allá." Compare Ana de Avilés's letters to letters by women included in Otte, *Cartas privadas*, 216, 313; Cook and Cook, *Good Faith*, 7–9, 102–4; Sánchez Rubio and Testón Núñez, *El hilo que une*, 88–91, 131.

His mother's pleas had the opposite of their desired effect. "I did not want to believe them, since I had been so certain for two years that [my first wife] was dead," Dionisio later wrote Beatriz; "But all this gave me notable pain as the situation required" (17r). Swiftly and secretly, Dionisio left Mexico. He was likely already in Spain when Alonso Moreno, a resident of Manila traveling in Mexico, accused him of bigamy to Mexican inquisitors in July 1608. By then, Dionisio was en route to Rome, where he denounced himself to the Holy Office of the Roman Inquisition at the beginning of 1609. Two weeks before Easter—a traditional period for self-denunciations and pardons—he abjured *de levi* for bigamy and was ordered to visit the seven privileged churches of Rome for special indulgences, fast on the first Friday of each month for three years and consume only bread and water on Good Friday, pray to the crown of the Virgin Mary once a week, and confess four times a year for three years with an approved confessor. Additionally, he was to return to his first wife. Dionisio completed his penitential tour of the Roman churches, returned to Spain to present his notarized abjuration documents to the Council of the Indies in Madrid, and by February 1610 was in Seville preparing his return to Mexico.¹⁵

From there, Dionisio sent a letter to Beatriz claiming that he had received letters proving that the whole affair "con gran maldad" (with great evil) was a "lie" and that María de Mercado truly was deceased (17v). "For me," he wrote, "this news made me the happiest I have ever been in my life, upon seeing my most cherished desire, which is to work all my days in your service and in the service of your good mother, fulfilled" (18r). He begged Beatriz to understand his actions, send news of their finances, inform his mother and a "cousin" in Mexico City of his pending arrival, and write him in Seville: "Tell me in many words of your health and the health of your mother and brothers, it will be a great happiness for me to know that all are well" (18r). Dionisio signed the letter using the name by which Beatriz had always known him: Juan Bautista de Vargas.

By late spring, Dionisio was on his way back to New Spain. He presented himself to the Inquisition in Mexico City in July. The latest document in his dossier is a letter to Inquisition officials from Beatriz in Tehuantepec, dated November 1610. She had received both Dionisio's and his mother's letters and heard that he was in Mexico City preparing to return to the Philippines. She

15. On the prosecution of bigamy by the Spanish and Roman Inquisitions and escape to Rome and self-denunciation as preemptive penitential strategies, see Lynn, *Between Court and Confessional*, 150, 158n53; Black, *Italian Inquisition*, 58; Fosi, *Papal Justice*, 35, 52, 142–45; Bethencourt, *Inquisition*, 334; Peters, *Inquisition*, 92–112; Amelang, "Exchanges between Italy and Spain," 441, 451. The commissary general who heard Vargas's case, "fray Estevan vicario de Garesio" (6r), appears in Del Col, "Commissario del Sant'Uffizio," 351.

characterized herself as an “impeded woman” and asked for her honor to be restored (16v). And so it was, although at whose insistence is unclear. In 1612 Dionisio requested the final blessing of his second marriage by the Inquisition’s commissary in Tehuantepec, Fr. Matheo de Porras. The union was made official in 1613, and the couple moved to Quetzalapa, Soconusco, Chiapas, near their matrimonial godfather, Beatriz’s brother Gabriel Marín Cortés.¹⁶

This was not, however, the end of Dionisio’s saga. In 1614, brother-in-law Gabriel denounced him to church officials in Ocelocalco for bigamy, abduction, and holding Beatriz against her will. Dionisio vigorously defended himself, accusing Gabriel of anger over a land dispute. We do not know how this latest twist in Dionisio’s long drama turned out. The paper trail ends with the forwarding of Gabriel’s accusation to Ciudad Real de Chiapas and, later, to the Inquisition in Mexico City.¹⁷

Global(ized) Itineraries and Circular Migrations

The expansiveness of Dionisio de Vargas’s itinerary versus the compact, almost claustrophobic quality of Gaspar Pérez’s captures a fundamental difference between their travels. The vastness of the Hapsburg empire provided opportunity and refuge for Dionisio, who remade his life more than once: in Mexico, Manila, Sonsonate, Tehuantepec, and Chiapas. He was one of thousands of Spaniards who sought their fortunes in the Americas in the second half of the sixteenth century, and one of hundreds who traveled to the Philippines between 1571 and 1590 only to find themselves surrounded by a large Chinese population and faced with food shortages, rampant inflation, and pirate attacks. His sojourn to Rome, as remarkable as it seems, likewise was part of an “intense human traffic” between Italy and Spain that included the Americas in its orbit.¹⁸ Like many other early modern European migrants and younger brothers, Dionisio strove for success by taking risks, working hard, seeking out patrons, and marrying well.¹⁹ He was described by his accuser Alonso Moreno as “a man

16. “Denuncia que Fray Matheo de Porras hace contra Juan Bautista de Vargas, por otro nombre Dionisio Vargas, por bigamo,” 1614, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (hereafter cited as AGN), Inquisición 301, exp. 42; *Relación breve*, 1:298–99.

17. “Denuncia que Fray Matheo de Porras,” 1614, AGN, Inquisición 301, exp. 42.

18. Amelang, “Exchanges between Italy and Spain,” 433. See also Dandele, *Spanish Rome*. The family name of Dionisio’s second wife, Marín, was a common Genoese surname. See Sarabia Vieja, “Presencia italiana,” 449–50; Borah, *Early Colonial Trade*, 37.

19. Pescador, *New World inside a Basque Village*; Altman, *Emigrants and Society*; Altman, *Transatlantic Ties*.

of good body, fat, blond, with some pockmarks on his face with a thick, blond beard that is graying, who is modest and”—in a phrase indicating good economic standing—“well dressed” (2v).

For European women, too, Spain’s century of imperial expansion offered the possibility of wealth and new beginnings. Both of Dionisio’s wives came from the minority of Iberian families who fanned out across the growing empire: María de Mercado from the small, elevated world of the nascent Euro-Philippine elite of Manila, Beatriz Marín de Cortés from the late sixteenth-century explosion of Spanish land acquisition and ranching in Tehuantepec.²⁰ While many Spanish women stayed in Iberia and never again saw their fathers, husbands, and sons who went abroad, others traveled widely and played a central role in securing their family’s fortunes. Dowries were an important form of finance in the merchant’s world of credit. Marriage and godparenthood extended the reach of a family’s collective pursuit of wealth and security.²¹ Travel could represent reunions, a fresh start, or an escape. Dionisio’s mother, Ana de Avilés, is a case in point. A widow, in 1588 she lived near or with her only daughter, Leonisia; her son-in-law, Bartolomé Sánchez de Valdelomar; and three granddaughters in Seville. In March, Sánchez de Valdelomar applied on Ana’s behalf for the entire household to sail to Mexico, where Ana’s five sons were reputed to be “very rich.”²² We might imagine the joy of a mother at this prospect, despite the radical change it implied.

Two weeks later, however, Sánchez de Valdelomar had someone copy the testimonies from Ana’s license to a new petition in his name, for his nuclear family only, and to Peru rather than Mexico. Dionisio’s brother Pedro de Vargas appears to have played a role in this betrayal, thereby earning his mother’s scorn; 20 years later, Ana still called Pedro her “worst enemy” (20r). Left behind, Ana remained in Seville until 1590, when, with Dionisio’s help, she renewed her passenger’s license to Mexico along with the six-year-old daughter of a different Vargas brother in Mexico who was in her care.²³ But by the time of the bigamy charges against Dionisio in 1608, Ana once again felt abandoned. In her letter to

20. On the Tehuantepec ranching boom, see Zeitlin, *Cultural Politics*.

21. Poska, *Women and Authority*; Hoberman, *Mexico’s Merchant Elite*, 33–70, 223–63; Valle Pavón, “Bases del poder.”

22. “Expediente de concesión de licencia,” 1588, AGI, Indiferente 2064, no. 86, fol. 4r.

23. “Expediente de concesión de licencia,” 1588, AGI, Indiferente 2064, no. 86, fol. 4r; cf. “Bartolomé Sánchez de Valdelomar,” 1588, AGI, Indiferente 2097, no. 100. Sánchez de Valdelomar’s petition sometimes literally crosses out “Peru” to replace it with “New Spain” and adds references to Leonisia in addition to diminishing or erasing references to Ana de Avilés.

Dionisio advising him that María de Mercado was alive, she suggested that they escape together to a new life in Havana or Cartagena, “where no one knows anything about me” (20r; donde nadie sepa nada de my).

By contrast, Gaspar does not seem to have sought invisibility or refashioning of the self when he traveled to Ciudad Vieja and married for a second time. The fact that Gaspar’s first wife, Ana, had recently borne a second, still very young child suggests that the couple remained in contact, although the child’s paternity and whether Gaspar also had a child with Margarita are unclear. Here we must pause to consider sexual mores in Mesoamerican society during the early modern period. Adultery was a serious matter punishable by whipping, hard labor, and slavery. William Taylor found it to be the leading cause of femicide in colonial-era court cases involving Mesoamericans from the Mixteca Alta, who “spoke feelingly about the shame” that adultery produced.²⁴ But for those who could afford to support large households, especially though not exclusively among the ruling class, polygyny was both acceptable and a means of consolidating power. Nahua nobles extended it to the Spanish in the first decades of contact, pledging their daughters as gifts of diplomacy, embodiments of alliance, and peace offerings. A proliferation of sixteenth-century property disputes in central Mexico between half-siblings—often euphemistically identified as their father’s household slaves—suggests that the practice continued despite the Catholic Church’s prohibitions.²⁵ Similar subterfuge is apparent in a criminal case from mid-seventeenth-century Oaxaca, in which neighbors denounced a Mesoamerican husband’s polygyny in order to solve a separate, political problem.²⁶

Male merchants not infrequently left their wives behind as they traveled Mesoamerica’s globalized trade routes, a situation that could lead to adultery by both partners and to multiple households in different towns on the part of the husband.²⁷ In 1563, the Spanish *alcalde mayor* noted this trend of spousal abandonment in the Mixteca Alta town of Texupa, on the road to Puebla.²⁸ But the

24. Taylor, *Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion*, 109. See also Taylor, 94; Terraciano, “Crime and Culture,” 728–30; Sousa, “Women and Crime,” 204.

25. Kellogg, *Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture*, 56; Carrasco, “Indian-Spanish Marriages,” 89; Zaballa Beascochea, “La influencia del Tercer Concilio.” On polygyny, social mobility, and royal consolidation in central Mexico, see Hassig, *Polygamy*; Townsend, “Polygyny and the Divided Altepēt.”

26. Yannakakis and Schrader-Kniffli, “Between the ‘Old Law’ and the New,” 532; cf. Nutini, “Polygyny.”

27. Sousa, *Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar*, 38, 80, 89–92, 155, 210.

28. Terraciano, *Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca*, 244; Stern, *Secret History of Gender*, 233.

separation and secrecy implied by European notions of bigamy fail to capture how Mesoamericans in the late sixteenth century wove relations of family and care amid the ever-present possibility of disaster. How to parse, for example, the situation of Gaspar and Margarita's neighbor in Ciudad Vieja, Catalina Vásquez, who in 1587 took her stepfather to court to claim as her inheritance merchandise that her biological father, a Mexicano merchant who had lived with her mother for many years in Ciudad Vieja without contracting Catholic marriage and who died without a will in the Soconusco town of Tilapa, at the fork of the camino real, had left with the stepfather to give to her?²⁹

Thus while Dionisio sequentially remade his life in one region or another, Gaspar and the other figures in his drama lived along a circuit of their own creation, returning to the same places and people time and again. Gaspar was "still living" hardly two days' travel from Huamelula, in Atotonilco outside Tehuantepec, when he met with the Mexicano church scribe who proposed his marriage to Margarita (2v). He did not formally meet Margarita for another year, and he continued his coastal travels during the week between his traditional betrothal ceremony and the wedding. As his geographical purview expanded, however, Gaspar maintained contact with his home region. He celebrated his wedding in Ciudad Vieja with friends from the Oaxacan coast and was allegedly informed of Ana's death by unidentified "Indians from Huamelula" (9v). All five men who testified against Gaspar also exhibited varying degrees of rootedness in multiple places along the Pacific coast. Ana's brother Sebastián Fabián claimed Huamelula as his hometown (*altepeuh*) and appears to have been a recent arrival to Guatemala. The three witnesses from Xicalapa seem more established there; one was inquiring about a will when he was asked to testify. Nevertheless, all self-identified as residents of Huamelula: as *chameque* in Nahuatl and *vecinos* in Spanish, both words implying residency, community obligations, and property ownership (1v, 2r, 3v, 4r).

Sebastián's coaccuser, Juan Bautista, had the deepest Guatemalan ties, claiming to be a native (*natural*) of Huamelula but a married resident citizen (*vecino*) of Miahuatlán, where he had lived for six years. Bautista received a letter in Miahuatlán notifying him of Gaspar's second marriage and was twice described by the Mesoamerican officials of Xicalapa as "our friend" (4r). Yet he too provided detailed information about the hometown he had left six years earlier. We might expect these witnesses to emphasize their links to Huamelula for the purposes of denouncing Gaspar. Nevertheless, their ongoing connections to

29. "El indígena Martín Gonzales reclama parte de la herencia de Catalina Vasquez," 1587, AGCA, A1.15, leg. 4809, exp. 41483.

Huamelula are notable. These men made regular stops at predictable places and times, adding new locales, maintaining and creating relationships, and balancing multiple centers of their lives simultaneously.

Gaspar Pérez and the other Mesoamericans in his story repeatedly crossed borders that remain stubbornly fortified in our narratives about this time and place: between Central America and Mexico; between Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guatemala, and El Salvador; and between Nahua, Chontal, Zapotec, Maya, and other linguistically defined Mesoamerican groups. It is unusual in colonial-era documentation—though, importantly, perhaps not in fact—to find six Mesoamerican men all under the age of 30 from a single small town on Oaxaca's Pacific coast living in Guatemala, keeping tabs on one another to a greater or lesser extent and still claiming ties to their hometown. But their movements should not surprise us. The Chontal of Huamelula had resisted incorporation into the Zapotec kingdom of Tehuantepec and the Mixtec kingdom of Tututepec, maintained a delicate autonomy from central Mexico's Triple Alliance, and resisted forced relocation by the Spanish (who labeled them rebellious and barbarous). They exported cotton, riverine gold dust, purple shell and red cochineal dyes, and salt almost exclusively along the southeastern coastal corridor toward Guatemala rather than the northeastern routes toward Tenochtitlan. They also bypassed central Mexico for imports such as obsidian, and in the early colonial period they adopted fewer Spanish-style goods than did those residing in other parts of Oaxaca. By all appearances, Gaspar Pérez and his compatriots came from an unusually independent area, the historical trading patterns of which were already oriented in the direction of their eventual migration.³⁰

The sixteenth century brought dramatic changes that can scarcely be imagined. Primary among these—potently combined with the stresses of military invasion, enslavement, political subjugation, environmental change, and religious repression—was epidemic disease. When Gaspar was born in the early 1560s, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec had already lost about 40 percent of its contact-era population. By the time that he, wife Ana, and the Huamelulan witnesses in his case were entering adulthood, that figure had doubled to 80 percent. A town like Huamelula, which in 1548 had approximately 220 households, would have been significantly hollowed out.³¹ Indeed, although Gaspar

30. Zborover, "Decolonizing Historical Archaeology," 315–23; Zborover, "Narrativas históricas y territoriales"; King, "Interregional Networks of the Oaxacan Early Postclassic"; Kroefges, "Prehispanic and Colonial Chontal Communities"; Ball and Brockington, "Trade and Travel."

31. Zeitlin, *Cultural Politics*, 125; Paso y Troncoso, *Papeles de Nueva España*, 121.

and Ana were likely no older than their mid-20s when their case came to court, they had by then lost all four of their parents and many of their siblings.

The epidemics, in turn, propelled a ranching boom across the isthmus. Forced relocation and proximity to the camino real facilitated the spread of disease. Abandoned lands were converted into pasture. Indigenous loss of life meant more available land for Spaniards like the Marín family, the in-laws of Dionisio de Vargas.³² Surviving Mesoamericans entered the ranching industry as messengers, porters, sheepshearers, cowboys, and ranch hands.³³ Elites who had been granted the privilege of riding Spanish mules and horses began raising large numbers of pack animals in the 1560s and 1570s. Mesoamerican muleteers and porters drove pack trains of typically 20 to 30 but sometimes as many as 100 animals at a time.³⁴ They were joined on the trade routes by Spanish immigrants, especially young men looking to build their fortunes, who sold biscuit, textiles, and other locally manufactured and imported products for cacao and indigo, which they invested in textile factories, bakeries, and other businesses in Spanish American cities.³⁵

Competition to control the supply of traditional Mesoamerican products also remained high. Unlike its neighbor Astata to the immediate south, Huamelula retained collective patrimony of small but valuable salt beds sought after by the Zapotec nobility of nearby Tehuantepec. By the 1570s these three towns monopolized the salt trade, edging others out of production.³⁶ In addition to meeting long-distance demand for salt, cotton mantas and finished textiles, copper bells and hatchets, feathers, and cacao, coastal merchants peddled iguanas, fish and shrimp, local pottery styles, and—increasingly—imported items from Asia and Europe.³⁷ While the Spanish built ports at Huatulco, Tehuantepec, Iztapa, and Acajutla and repurposed existing land routes, Mesoamericans continued to transport merchandise along coastal footpaths and estuaries.³⁸

This context of economic change and continuity in the midst of colonialism and death fills in some of the archival gaps in Gaspar Pérez's story. He noted that he did not practice a trade, such as carpentry, baking, or metallurgy.

32. Viqueira, "Ires y venires," 160–61; Romero Frizzi, *Economía y vida*, 105–8, cited in Zeitlin and Thomas, "Indian Consumers," 14.

33. Gutiérrez Brockington, *Leverage of Labor*.

34. Zeitlin, *Cultural Politics*, 144, 155–58; Gage, *New Survey of the West-Indies*, 195.

35. Altman, *Transatlantic Ties*, 64–70.

36. Zeitlin, *Cultural Politics*, 145; Acuña, *Relaciones geográficas*, 191, 358; Andrews, *Maya Salt Production*; Romero Frizzi, "Los caminos de Oaxaca."

37. Zeitlin and Thomas, "Indian Consumers."

38. Navarrete, "Pre-Hispanic System," 80–81.

There is no indication that he was formerly enslaved and thus dislocated by force. Similarly, the witnesses against him are not identified as formerly enslaved, nor as *naborías* (servants) tied to Spanish masters, nor by occupation such as porter, artisan, or merchant. All seem to have left Huamelula voluntarily, established families elsewhere, and maintained connections along the coastal branch of the camino real from Tehuantepec through the Soconusco and into Suchitpéquez and Escuintla. Their labor was in demand. As early as the 1540s, Xicalapa's encomendero, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, was obliged to hire nonlocal workers to turn a profit. Between 1577 and 1584, the number of local families dropped by half.³⁹ Perhaps the Huamelulan witnesses from Xicalapa who testified against Gaspar Pérez in 1589 were migrant or immigrant workers, their itinerancy facilitated by roadways that linked the coast from Huatulco to Acajutla with Antequera, Quetzaltenango, Chimaltenango, Santiago de Guatemala, and other highland Mesoamerican and Spanish American market centers. Indeed, one of the most prominent secondary branches of the camino real from Santiago led straight to Xicalapa.⁴⁰ Juan Bautista from Miahuatlán surely traveled this road to secure testimony from the three Xicalapan witnesses against Gaspar, as did Gaspar himself on his quick trip to the coast before marrying Margarita; in both cases, the round-trip journey took one week. The clustering of at least four of the five witnesses against Gaspar in this very specific area of Suchitpéquez suggests that at the end of the sixteenth century, the coastal routes between Oaxaca and Guatemala were indeed well traveled by Huamelulans.

Escape, Evasion, Entrapment

Despite Dionisio's remarkable ability to stay one step ahead of trouble, his escape from the past was never total. In Sonsonate and Tehuantepec he ran into or met with people he knew from Manila who passed on the news that María had died. He established contact with church officials in Oaxaca, including one from Manila, who sanctioned his new life with Beatriz. His move to Tehuantepec

39. "Beatriz Sánchez de Ortega contra Francisco de la Cueva," 1542–50, AGI, Justicia 280, no. 1, fols. 39r–45v, 99v; "Autos seguidos por el Pbro. Antonio Rodríguez contra Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo de Medrano," 1577, AGCA, A3.12, leg. 2774, exp. 40022, fol. 18r–v; "Cartas de audiencia," 1584, AGI, Guatemala 10, ramo 11, no. 105, cited in MacLeod, *Spanish Central America*, 89.

40. "Tres informaciones sobre a cual de los obispos de Guatemala, Chiapa o la Verapaz debía agregarse la provincia de Soconusco," 1563–67, AGI, Justicia 1040; British Library, London, Western Manuscripts, Add MS 17650–17651, no. 5; Machuca Gallegos, *Comercio de sal*, 196–97; Navarrete, "Pre-Hispanic System."

also reconnected Dionisio to his family's social network in central Mexico, which now included his own former contacts from the Philippines: friends of his first wife, for instance, and high-ranking acquaintances from their wedding.

Nor was Dionisio's radical step of self-denunciation in Rome the secret escape that he claimed. He had contacts within both the Spanish and the Roman Inquisition, and this was not his first trip to Rome. In 1603—notably, three years after his loss of cargo on the *Santa Margarita* and the *San Gerónimo*—he traveled at least once from Manila to Seville as Dionisio de Vargas, “citizen of the city of Manila of the Philippine Islands and married there.” From Seville, he continued to Rome and hand delivered a set of letters to Bernardo de Olmedilla, a Spanish inquisitor from the tribunal of Llerena, Badajoz, Extremadura, and newly appointed adviser to the Council of the Indies. In August 1604, Dionisio wrote to Olmedilla from Madrid briefly advising him to forward the letters to the Council of the Indies “so that there they may be obeyed.”⁴¹ Five years later, faced with accusations of bigamy and possibly aware of the early seventeenth-century Roman Inquisition's tendency to deal with such crimes less harshly than the inquisitors of Spain and New Spain, Dionisio followed his own advice and personally delivered his abjuration papers to the Council of the Indies in Madrid. To effect his flight to Italy, his self-denunciation in 1609, and the presentation of his Roman documents to the highest judicial court of the Indies, he surely depended on old and new friends on both sides of the Atlantic—including, perhaps, the influential inquisitor and doctor Bernardo de Olmedilla.

On his return to Mexico from Italy in 1610, Dionisio once again attempted to line up allies in advance. Chief among them was the “cousin” whom he requested that Beatriz contact in Mexico City: Cristóbal de Zuleta, a wealthy merchant, former captain of numerous ships from Manila, and interim treasurer (1607–17) of the powerful Casa de Moneda of New Spain, one of the viceroyalty's most expensive offices.⁴² Whether or not Zuleta was a blood relative, he came from the same Seville neighborhood (*collación*) of San Lorenzo as the Vargas family and had been involved in their legal affairs for decades.⁴³ His

41. “Petición de Dionisio de Vargas de testimonio de cartas,” 1604, AGI, Filipinas 5, no. 21. See also Gómez González, “Bernardo de Olmedilla”; Casado Alonso, “Los flujos de información.”

42. Hoberman, *Mexico's Merchant Elite*, 45, 67, 158, 248–50. Cristóbal de Zuleta occupied the office of treasurer on behalf of his brothers-in-law, both minors. His father-in-law, merchant Diego Matías de Vera, bought the office for “the highest known price paid for a public office at that time,” 250,000 pesos plus 16,500 to make the post inheritable; Hoberman, 248. Zuleta contributed 20,000 pesos in arras to his matrimony with Vera's daughter Ana, whose dowry was an extraordinary 70,000 pesos.

43. Castillo Rubio, “Las collaciones de la Sevilla renacentista.”

older brother Fernando, also a prominent merchant and ship's captain, had supported the family's petition to bring Ana de Avilés and her daughter's family to the Americas in 1588.⁴⁴ More recently, Cristóbal de Zuleta had granted permission for her granddaughter María, whom she had brought to Mexico in 1590, to marry against Ana's wishes. Ana called Zuleta "the arrogant one" (El Ynchado), decried her new son-in-law's poor treatment of her, and informed Dionisio that she had moved in with the family of a Mexico City velvet weaver—a respectable trade, but nowhere close to the status of Zuleta (19v). If Dionisio had reason to hide from his family in Sonsonate and Tehuantepec, Zuleta would have been a dangerous enemy. With absolution papers in hand, Dionisio now sought his support.

Dionisio's far-flung relationships thus enabled his evasion of the law but also posed dangers both predictable and unforeseen. Truthfully or not, someone told Beatriz that he had arrived in Mexico City and was on his way back to Manila. Antonio de Morga, who had attended Dionisio and María de Mercado's wedding in the Philippines, was now head of the Audiencia de México's criminal court and adviser to the Inquisition. Morga may have been particularly sensitive to accusations of marital misbehavior; his daughter Juliana had eloped with a young Spaniard from Manila named Juan de Mujica—who had also attended Dionisio and María's wedding—around the same time that Dionisio was absconding to Sonsonate.⁴⁵ Intriguingly, Mujica was now one of Dionisio's chief accusers, having informed Alonso Moreno of Dionisio's second marriage in Tehuantepec while Moreno sought to deliver María's letters to her husband. And after consulting with the Catholic officials in Oaxaca who had earlier helped Dionisio confirm his widowerhood, Fr. Matheo de Porrás, the inquisitorial commissary of Tehuantepec who had given the final blessing for Dionisio's second nuptials, found himself obliged to refer Beatriz's brother's bigamy denunciation against Dionisio to his superiors in Mexico City. We should think of Dionisio's experience not in the linear terms of itineracy or as a kind of temporal-geographical Venn diagram with discrete but overlapping

44. Fernando de Zuleta's testimony for Ana de Avilés is in "Bartolomé Sánchez de Valdelomar," 1588, AGI, Indiferente 2097, no. 100. Like his brother Cristóbal, Fernando, who eventually returned to Seville, ran in elevated circles; in 1597 he was involved in a dispute over a shipment of wine with the viceroy of New Spain, Álvaro Manrique de Zúñiga. See "Autos del marqués de Villamanrique, virrey que fue de Nueva España, con Hernando de Zuleta, maestre," 1597, AGI, Contratación 744, no. 5.

45. "Información sobre el casamiento de Juliana de Morga," 1602, AGI, Filipinas 7, ramo 1, no. 1; "Carta de Morga sobre fuga y casamiento de su hija Juliana," 1602, AGI, Filipinas 19, ramo 3, no. 41.

spheres of action, but as a high-stakes, ever-expanding social geography whose shifting centers and nodes of contact he attempted to control with varying levels of success.

Gaspar Pérez's social geography was equally complex, capable of supporting him in times of trouble or ensnaring him in past relationships. That the details of those relationships come to us via Nahuatl as a language of both translation and law is significant on multiple levels. Thus far, I have avoided assigning an ethnic identity to Gaspar or his fellow Huamelulans. Speakers of Chontal, Huave, Mixtec, Zapotec, and Nahuatl languages had been neighbors on the Oaxacan coast since at least the eleventh century. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries their polities lay geographically and politically wedged between the competing powers of Zapotec Tehuantepec, Mixtec Tututepec, and the imperial center of Tenochtitlan, a situation often played to local advantage. It is possible, then, that Gaspar and the Huamelulan witnesses against him spoke the Nahuatl language Pochutec as their first language, even though Huamelula was and remains dominated by Chontal speakers and Gaspar's trial records make no mention of *mexicano corrupto*, a phrase typically used to indicate Nahuatl languages like Pochutec that significantly differed from central Mexican Nahuatl.⁴⁶ It is also possible that these Huamelulans descended from Nahuatl-speaking colonists who had arrived more recently, under either Aztec or Spanish imperialism, and spoke central Mexican Nahuatl, by then the clear standard of colonial administration.⁴⁷

Far more probable is that Gaspar and his accusers were Chontal speakers who learned Nahuatl as a second language, not because they were trained scribes or members of the nobility but because they frequented the globalized trade routes along which Nahuatl's usefulness had significantly increased.⁴⁸ Discerning the many varieties of Nahuatl languages spoken along the Pacific branches of the early camino real can be challenging. For instance, when the parish priest of Huatulco, Diego de Paz Monterrey, was accused in 1612 of raping five women from Pochutla, his defenders used the women's facility in Pochutec against them, claiming that they were "ladinas en lengua mexicana" (second-language speakers of Nahuatl) precisely because of their "loose" relationships with Spaniards, Africans, and others who passed through Huatulco

46. On Nahua in Oaxaca, see Vázquez Mendoza, *Pueblo a orilla del mar*; Dakin, "Western and Central Nahua Dialects."

47. Schwaller, "Language of Empire."

48. Dakin and Lutz, *Nuestro pesar*; Swanton, "Multilingualism"; Herrera, *Natives, Europeans, and Africans*; Terraciano, *Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca*, 41–47; Zborover, "Narrativas históricas y territoriales," 70–76.

and Tehuantepec.⁴⁹ (In a painful irony, de Paz Monterrey was the priest whom Dionisio de Vargas knew from Manila and tracked down in Tehuantepec for information about María de Mercado.)

Similarly, in the much-coveted cacao-growing regions of the Pacific coast, regional Nahuatl languages had been spoken for centuries. Ten years prior to Gaspar's trial, a Spanish scribe identified *la lengua mexicana* as the native language (*lengua materna*) of Xicalapa, where so many of the Huamelulan witnesses against Gaspar had settled.⁵⁰ It is unclear whether the scribe meant southwestern coastal Nawat or central Mexican Nahuatl and whether this reflected the predominant language of the preinvasion community (which in 1579 had only 25 surviving tributaries) or of more recent arrivals. Regardless, Gaspar's case presents the question with unusual clarity: To what extent did the presence of Nahuatl-speaking populations, whether local or migrant, native-speaking or not, facilitate the sixteenth-century globalization of coastal Pacific Central America across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, with multilingual Oaxacans playing a key role in this process?

As much as, if not more than, the Spanish, the Mexicano *yndios conquistadores* promoted this sixteenth-century adoption of Nahuatl in war-torn Maya, Xinka, and Nawat territory. They established colonies throughout the region, intermarried with local elites, and became crucial go-betweens of empire.⁵¹ Extremely jealous of their prerogatives in Central America, the Mexicanos sat, precariously, near the top of the region's emerging colonial social, political, and military hierarchy. Their high status in Spanish colonial Guatemala may have encouraged Gaspar to accept the arrangement of his second marriage. So, too, may have Ciudad Vieja's key geographical position at the crossroads of the camino real, directly linking Huamelula via Tehuantepec to the heart of Spanish royal administration and commerce in the Maya highlands and, from there, to the ports, cattle ranches, markets, and indigo and cacao plantations of the far southwestern coast and the mining regions of Honduras.

We should also consider what social, political, and economic capital Gaspar himself brought to the bargain, even if the archive does not yield many answers. Why would the leaders of the most powerful colony of Nahua invaders in Central America invest time and resources persuading him to marry one of

49. Santiago Delgado, "La lujuria bajo el ropaje," 96–97.

50. "El reverendo padre Antón Rodríguez reclama paga de salario," 1579, AGCA, A3.12, leg. 2774, exp. 40022. I thank John Prybot and Wendy Kramer for their thoughts about this document.

51. Yannakakis, *Art of Being In-between*; Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*; Megged, "Nahua Patterns of Colonization."

their community's daughters? Marriage negotiations typically involved ritual gift giving by both families.⁵² But this was not an arrangement between two young people from the same town moving into adulthood. Gaspar was an older bridegroom from elsewhere, with his own means of support. Margarita's father was dead, although her mother had remarried. The church scribe López took responsibility for finding Margarita a husband, perhaps as her godparent. In Gaspar, he had found someone who, while not a fellow Nahua of central Mexican descent, was fluent in Nahuatl, raised in the Catholic Church, and quite possibly of significant economic means.

Whatever their nature, in the end Gaspar's close relations with political authorities in Ciudad Vieja failed to protect him and may even have been a liability. At the time that he was accused of bigamy, Ciudad Vieja's leaders were awaiting resolution of their petition asking the crown for collective tribute exemption and freedom from forced labor, initiated in 1564. Prominent among the witnesses presented in that petition was Diego Elías, yndio conquistador from Coyoacán, who in 1589 was a revered elder and one of two local judges (*alcaldes*) informed of the accusations against Gaspar by Ciudad Vieja's Franciscan prior.⁵³ The Mexicanos had long cultivated good relations with the Franciscans, whom they assisted in persuading—or forcing—local Kaqchikel and other Maya to accept Catholic evangelization. When the Spanish city of Santiago en Almolonga was destroyed by a mudslide and moved to the nearby Valle de Panchoy in 1541, only the Franciscans kept their convent at the boundary of the former Spanish *traza* and the allied Mexicano settlement of Ciudad Vieja. Fr. Diego Martín, the Franciscan who received the Spaniard Juan Rodríguez's denunciation of Gaspar, was, in the words of the Ciudad Vieja authorities, “our precious [*totlaçotatzin*] *padre guardián*” of this same convent (1r).⁵⁴ In the midst of a legal battle for privileges that depended on demonstrating their loyalty to the Spanish crown and Catholicism, the Mexicano cabildo of Ciudad Vieja could ill afford to be associated with arranging a bigamist union. “We did not know if he was already married there in his hometown. No one anywhere knew” (3v).

Gaspar's own, lifelong relationship with the Catholic Church narrowed his escape paths even further. In his statement to the Mexicano officials, Gaspar did not deny that he was twice married in the Catholic Church. He described both

52. Sousa, *Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar*, 70; Chance, “Marriage Alliances.”

53. Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 86n34, 126, 212n78, 222, 223n107.

54. That Fr. Martín was prior of the Franciscan convent at the time of Gaspar's hearing is suggested by Vásquez, *Crónica de la provincia*, 1:98, 2:293–300; see also Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*, 153–56.

unions using Nahuatl terms for Christian matrimony, *inamic* and *namique*.⁵⁵ He identified many of the people involved by name, including the priest and matrimonial godparents from his first marriage in Huamelula and the Mexicano church steward Pedro Bobadilla, who had joined López in presenting Gaspar and Margarita to Fr. Martín. All would have been held accountable to Catholic teachings regarding polygyny. Gaspar's confession foreshadows the language in 1634 of Acolhua-Spanish priest Bartolomé de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, who counseled those with an impediment to marriage to "speak up, because if not you will incur God's disdain. . . . Do not let the devil confuse you with something, for you will go to hell if the marriage is thus impeded, and all that which will afflict those who are getting married will become your burden of responsibility. Open well your eyes!"⁵⁶ Perhaps Gaspar was slower to realize his predicament than the Mexicano officials, or perhaps a confession initially seemed the best way to proceed. In any case, the stakes were high for everyone.

Which brings us to the most overlooked characters so far: Ana and Margarita, the wives of Gaspar. Like María de Mercado, they left behind neither letters nor testimony. Second wife Margarita is barely mentioned by the Mexicano officials and not at all by Gaspar's Spanish legal defenders, although she and her family would have been responsible for providing Gaspar's food while enduring the loss of his income and labor during his yearlong imprisonment and beyond. First wife Ana is also rendered silent, but the archive leaves a strong residual impression of her. She and Gaspar had lived next door to her brother Sebastián in Huamelula, suggesting a matrilocal household that, Sebastián informs us, included several of his and Ana's other siblings. Now, however, Ana's parents were dead, and Sebastián and his friend Juan Bautista led the accusations against Gaspar. Why would Sebastián denounce the husband from whom Ana presumably expected economic support?

As for Ana herself, we can only imagine the implications of Gaspar's establishment of a second household or her brother Sebastián's migration. Perhaps she had accepted Gaspar's polygyny based on benefits that it also brought her. Perhaps Gaspar was neglecting his responsibilities or had abandoned her entirely. He may have been abusive, or the second child was not his and the bigamy charge helped manage the situation. Ana may have felt jealous of Gaspar's family in Guatemala to an extent that overrode the potential downsides of denouncing

55. For Ana, "ca onca noçihuah nochan ninamique ytoca noçihuah Ana" (2v). For Margarita, "namicti Margarita nican chane almoloncan" (3r). Cline, *Book of Tributes*, 51–54; Townsend, "What in the World."

56. Quoted in Sousa, *Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar*, 57. See also Sousa, 77; Molina, *Confesionario mayor*, 46r.

him to Spanish officials. If Gaspar was avoiding Huamelula, Ana could not have as easily resorted to denouncing him to local, nonjudicial authorities, as Bianca Premo argues was the more typical and cautious path of Oaxacan Indigenous (and rural Spanish) women seeking to set things straight with their husbands at the end of the eighteenth century. Ana may have asked her brother to act on her behalf, but she may not have been able to intervene in the process from afar. She may have been surprised by or regretted the harshness of Gaspar's punishment, or she may not have been party to the accusation at all. All these possibilities fit a recognizable pattern of Mesoamerican gender relations in which women and men entered marriage with a mutual duty to support one another through their labor, condemned adultery but sometimes tolerated male polygyny, and used the colonial courts and Spanish regulations of sexuality and marriage to forge their own paths.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Gaspar Pérez's and Dionisio de Vargas's geographies and experiences may have overlapped, but they lived in very different worlds. As was the case for many other Europeans, globalization presented Dionisio de Vargas with danger but also with possibilities for self-advancement and travel that his grandparents could have scarcely imagined. Dionisio is noteworthy only for his evasion of the Inquisition effected by retracing his social networks across the globe. If we are feeling charitable, we might hope that having spent his adulthood refashioning his life from one setting to the next and deftly staying one step ahead of the law, Dionisio was finally able to settle down. For him, southwestern Mesoamerica—first Sonsonate, then Tehuantepec, and then the Soconusco—provided refuge from a past that constantly threatened to envelop him.

The same geography was, for Gaspar Pérez, an extended homeland drained of people by war, enslavement, foreign invaders, and epidemic disease. Having lost most of one family and built two others in the shadow of the Catholic Church, Gaspar ended up in bondage. If he survived his six-year sentence to servitude, his unfreedom may very well have continued. We might even imagine—with plenty of comparative cases to reinforce the possibility, despite the illegality of sending Indigenous Americans to the galleys—that having lived his whole life along the coast, Gaspar was ultimately put out to sea: lost on an ocean of possibilities, none of them particularly good.

57. Premo, "Felipa's Braid." Steve Stern suggests that Oaxacan women were unusually willing to use New Spanish courts to contest a husband's infidelity; see Stern, *Secret History of Gender*, 24, 79–80. Lisa Sousa disagrees; see Sousa, *Woman Who Turned into a Jaguar*, 109.

Gaspar's story can certainly be understood as one of Indigenous victimization by Catholic laws that contradicted Mesoamerican understandings of marriage, especially in contrast to Dionisio's savvy manipulation of the Inquisition. But reading each man's story in light of the other's—and, in particular, comparing their mobilities—leads to less expected conclusions. For example, if Dionisio's itinerary was more expansive than Gaspar's, this is not because Mesoamericans never crossed the ocean.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Gaspar's and the other Huamelulans' travels run contrary to a persistent emphasis on the local in scholarship on post-Columbian Mesoamerica, a legacy of the Spanish archive and of Mesoamericans' own political, territorial, and historical claims over time. Gaspar and his fellow migrants were not refugees being forced into *reducciones* in new locales, nor were they wandering *forasteros* fleeing the labor obligations of their hometowns.⁵⁹ Having survived the *cocoliztli* epidemic of the 1570s, they found work and built community while moving along ancient yet rapidly changing trade routes. Their mobility underscores the interregional connections and long-distance migrations that have always been part of Mesoamerican history, especially in times of crisis. Indeed, why should we assume that Gaspar's second marriage was arranged in Atotonilco outside Tehuantepec rather than (to suggest one of many possible alternatives) the market city of Atotonilco el Grande on the road north from Mexico City: an enclave of Acolhua from Texcoco, the *altepetl* where second wife Margarita's mother grew up?⁶⁰

Conversely, the image of Gaspar moving through his wounded world encourages us think harder about how Dionisio, a Spanish Catholic living at the height of the Counter-Reformation, might have experienced the same landscapes and waterscapes. For Mesoamericans then and now, rivers, mountains, caves, plants, and built structures are living beings that interact with humans and nonhumans, shelter ancestors and guardians, and seek mutual engagement. In the Chontal languages spoken in the highlands near Huamelula, one does not walk on a road or toward a mountain; rather, one receives it.⁶¹ Sixteenth-century

58. Van Deusen, *Global Indians*.

59. While the Huamelulans are not the vagabonds of Spanish stereotype, their movements do match some patterns of Andean *forastero* migration. See Wightman, *Indigenous Migration*; Gutiérrez Brockington, *Blacks, Indians, and Spaniards*, 228–33; Ramos, “Sacred Boundaries,” 247–49. The Huamelulans' migration patterns, however, differ from flight in the Yucatan. See Farriss, *Maya Society*, 200–220; Lentz, “Mediating at the Margins.”

60. Berdan and Anawalt, *Essential Codex Mendoza*, 57–58. Compare this mobility to the complementary processes of “moving on” and “settling down” described in Roller, *Amazonian Routes*, 4. See also Yannakakis, “Justice on the Mountain.”

61. O'Connor and Kroefges, “Land Remembers,” 300, 306; Zborover, “Decolonizing Historical Archaeology,” 210–12, 357. On Mesoamericans walking, see Stanzone,

Spaniards traveling the southwestern camino real, on the other hand, described the road in terms of discovery and challenge.⁶² To confront swollen streams, aggressive insects, or more preternatural threats, Dionisio may have sought protection through a more limited range of animate materials such as churches, shrines, crosses, rosaries, relics, and images, which in the Christian worldview did not possess their own, independent aliveness but were imbued by God with supernatural immanence.⁶³ As he moved through foreign places marked by disasters not necessarily his own, how would Dionisio have perceived his surroundings? What encounters, human and otherwise, would he have tried to avoid, and what signs would he have missed altogether?

Above all, setting Dionisio and Gaspar side by side encourages us to go beyond their apparent similarities as accused bigamists in the Spanish colonial judicial system and to sit for a long moment with the terrible disparities between them.⁶⁴ The extraordinary upside-downness, the life essences gone awry, the deep sense of moral inversion that Mesoamericans faced at the end of the sixteenth century are beyond comprehension. In such a context, movement itself—whether along ancient, now globalized roads or the closer-by pathways of home—constituted a brave act of survivance and repair: of learning, enacting, and adapting ancestral knowledge amid unavoidable and often deeply painful new realities, laying trails into the future.

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“Walking Is Knowing,” esp. 322; Osowski, *Indigenous Miracles*, 71; García-Zambrano, “Ancestral Rituals.” On landscape and the built environment, see Umberger, “Imperial Inscriptions”; Wake, *Framing the Sacred*, 126; Stross, “Maize in Word and Image,” 210–12; Piedrasanta Herrera, *Los Chuj*, 43–69; Brown, “Planting the Bones.”

62. For example, *Relación breve*, 1:298–304, 436–37, 464–67.

63. On Christian understandings of immanence and animate matter, see Bynum, *Christian Materiality*; Merback, *Pilgrimage and Pogrom*, 11–13; cf. McAnany, “Soul Proprietors.” On preternatural interventions of angels and demons in the material world, see Campagne, “Witchcraft”; Keitt, “Devil in the Old World.”

64. See Hämäläinen, “Lost in Transitions.” Recent meditations on Mesoamerican survivance in the sixteenth century include Crewe, “Building in the Shadow of Death”; Hughes, *Church of the Dead*.

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