

# **O**thering Through Description and Othering Through Action: How Author Motivation Influenced the Perception of Native Females, and their Treatment in Sixteenth Century Conquistador Accounts.

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## **Abstract**

Cultural stereotyping, or Othering, occurs as a result of human nature whenever cross cultural interactions occur. The author examines the chronicles of the Spanish conquistadors: Álvar Núñez Cabeza De Vaca, Vásquez De Coronado and Hernando De Soto and discovers that these chronicles are littered with instances of explicit and implicit Othering of Native American females. Their writings indicate that when hidden agendas propelled the composition of these works, or said authors lacked military superiority, Othering occurred implicitly through description. In cases of military superiority or a lack of ulterior motives in authorship of such works, Othering occurred explicitly through action. Those who Othered solely through description managed to escape criticism from contemporaries. However, conquistadors who Othered through action experienced scathing criticism. Ultimately, these conquistadors' actions led to a sixteen century debate concerning the humanity of Native Americans.

## **Keywords**

Other, conquistador, Native American, females, Cross cultural interaction

## Introduction

During the sixteenth century, Spanish conquistadors invaded indigenous civilizations in the present day southern United States. The men traversed the area in the hopes of obtaining gold and glory, as is evidenced by the accounts of prominent conquistadors such as Álvar Núñez Cabeza De Vaca, Hernando De Soto and Vásquez De Coronado.<sup>1</sup> While these men failed in their quest of gold and glory in their journeys, they found something the natives considered equally valuable, in terms of currency – indigenous women (Clayton 1994).

The *caciques*, or leaders, of the Arawak nation introduced the Spaniards to the indigenous practice of gifting women in 1498. Amerigo Vespucci and Alonso de Ojeda received sixteen native females as tokens of peace when they landed at the Gulf of Maracaibo. In 1502, Columbus landed on the Mosquito Coast and was presented with the wife of a *cacique*. Seventeen years later, the Cempoallans bestowed eight women upon Hernán Cortéz, all daughters of *caciques* (Shipp 1881, 638-639). By the mid sixteenth century, this practice was standard across the Americas, as evidenced by chronicles of New Spains exploration.

However, not all native women joined the Spaniards as gifts. Some joined them as captives, while others befriended the men out of pity. The exact relationship between the Spaniards and the females encountered depended on the circumstances the men found themselves in. In positions of military power, the Spaniards exhibited atrocious behavior towards them. Conversely, when reliant on native goodwill for survival, the Spaniards refrained from such behavior. Instead, they used their encounters to ponder with awe the customs and practices of the natives related to native women.

The correlation between the treatment of native women and the power (or lack thereof) of the Spaniards is hardly a surprising one. Eiryls Barker documents this trend in her study of eighteenth-century English male/indigenous female relations. She argues that, initially, relations between the English colonists maintained peaceful relations with the Native Americans because colonial development was dependent on such interactions. However, “by the 1770’s,” Barker writes, “women were regarded merely as personal sexual perks and sources of comfort in an increasingly hostile environment” (1997, 54). She concludes that as the eighteenth-century English colonists became more independent in terms of survival they increasingly disrespected native females through their actions (Wade 1997, 333). This conclusion also applies to the sixteenth-century conquistadors.

Just as the English colonists, conquistadors reliant on the natives for survival maintained friendly relations. However, Spaniards who were not, made enemies of them. De Vaca, utilized indigenous females during his stay. According to his autobiographical account of the 1527 Navárez expedition, he used them only as willing participants. Later conquistadors chronicles indicate the converse. The expeditions of De Soto (1539) and Coronado (1540) utilized natives as objects, as means merely to an end.

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent discussion of the link between the terms conquistador, gold, glory and their association with the above men, see: (McAlister 1984, 89-108)

The reason for the polarity in actions between the two groups of conquistador's lies in their level of reliance on the natives for survival. Unlike De Vaca who encountered the natives through a shipwreck, Coronado and De Soto prepared fully for their expeditions. They were well aware of the potential for warfare and the logistics of such journeys. They learned from De Vaca's tales of the wilds of northern New Spain, but were driven by greed to undertake such a trip. Professor Thayer Watkins best describes how the myth of power, gold and glory perpetuated by De Vaca led to these men's campaigns:

[De Vaca] tried to express his knowledge of what was in the territories in such a way that it would appeal to the interests of the leaders of the Empire. For example, he mentioned precious stones, by which he meant turquoise, but this was interpreted to mean emeralds (Watkins 2011).

De Soto interpreted De Vaca's findings as evidence of gold. After his return to Spain, De Vaca met privately with De Soto and described to him the land he traversed for eight years. De Vaca described the terrain as inhospitable and the journey as almost impossible, but he was undeterred. He interpreted these negative descriptions to mean that De Vaca was withholding secrets of wealth in northern New Spain (Duncan 1997, 219). Because the Florida territory was already claimed for exploration by De Soto, according to Watkins, Coronado set his sights on north west New Spain. He, along with the viceroy of New Spain, Don Antonio de Mendoza, pooled their savings and began a hunt for the mythical seven cities of gold.

Each of these men learned from the problems of De Vaca and the three survivors of the shipwreck. As a result, they amassed large armies of young men for their ventures. The natives found themselves at the mercy of De Soto and Coronado's men for survival, due to their relative military strength. Because of this, the male conquistadors' actions towards native females were unrestrained. They utilized them as sex objects, nurses and guides, to name only a few. However, De Vaca's journey was a pioneering one. He found himself without military or logistical support during his stay, forcing him to observe indigenous females from afar instead of abusing them as De Soto and Coronado's men did.

While both De Soto and Coronado were of similar military strength, the former's chroniclers are much more explicit concerning their savage treatment of native females. This is due to the differing motives behind their works. Pedro Castañeda, recorded the events of De Coronado's travels with the hope of gaining political favor, as he implicitly admits in his introduction (Castañeda 1904, xxxii). Castañeda's personal finances support the conclusion that he hoped to gain political favor. It typically translated into payment of land, money or titles. Prior to the Coronado journey, Castañeda was a common soldier, which suggests that he did not come from financial opulence. In 1554, five years prior to the creation of his work, Castañeda's wife and eight children filed a claim against the Mexican treasury in hopes of profiting from his exploits (1904, vi). Castañeda's introduction, lack of financial means, and claim against the treasury, demonstrates that political prestige, and by extension, money, motivated him to author his work.

Neither of De Soto's chroniclers include this as a reason for writing their works. In fact, they fail to include any reason at all. Furthermore, circumstantial evidence indicates that De Soto's biographers wrote for reasons other than this. In theory, Rodrigo Rangel, De Soto's personal secretary wrote his account to convince the crown to colonize *La Florida* (Kenny 2009, 70). This explains his unabashed honesty regarding the conquistadors actions. To satisfy his goal, Rangel depicted the natives as inferior and conquerable. He extensively documented the conquistador's unsavory actions towards indigenous females, portraying them as easily subdued. By doing so, Rangel attempted to entice the crown into colonization. De Soto's other chronicler chose to remain anonymous, referring to himself only as the Gentleman from Elvas. His anonymity combined with the lack of introduction, suggests political motivation was not a reason for the account. Yet, political favor does underlie Castañeda's motivation for writing. He portrayed a white washed version of militarily strong conquistadors traversing the New World. Conversely, De Soto's writers presented an unvarnished version of the truth. To the Europeans there existed a line between "us and them." The natives, especially the females, were both exotic and erotic (Porter 1989, 117-145). Chroniclers like De Vaca and Castañeda perpetuated this myth, but De Soto's chroniclers took this one step further, using this myth to justify, to themselves, their actions towards indigenous women.

The perpetuation of the myth of an exotic and inferior race is one which scholars term Othering. Scholars define Othering, or terming a group the Other, as "persons [in this case the Spanish] stress what makes them dissimilar from or opposite of another, and this carries over into the way they represent others, especially through stereotypical images" (Ulrich 2005). By their entrance into the New World the Spaniards were well versed in Othering. This formed the basis for the *Reconquista*, or Reconquest, of the Iberian peninsula, and many references to the defeated Other, the Moors, pepper the writers descriptions of indigenous females. (Gelvin 2007, 38-40). Scholar Francis Jennings notes, "for the Spaniards, conquest in Mexico was a continuation of the 700-year Reconquest of Spain from the Moors" Historian Matthew Restall also comments, "the ideology of the Spanish empire was rooted in medieval jurisprudence and the mythology of the Christian *Reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula" (2004, 68). When the Reconquest ended, the Spaniards set their sights on the New World, using Othering as their justification.

The scholarly community lacks a study describing the Spaniards Othering of the indigenous peoples. As late as the mid twentieth century, Hegel propagated the acceptance of the Other mentality in relation to them. He argued that the Native Americans were a legitimate Other because they lacked physical vigor and the capability to assimilate (Blaney 2010, 131). It was not until 1995 that scholars examined with any scrutiny how the Spaniards propagated the Other. Although only one short passage of David Richards' work scrutinizes the dissemination of the Other, it nonetheless deserves examination. He indicates that pageantry and monuments, both products of the Spanish crown designed to demonstrate imperial dominance, reinforced the depiction of the Other. He writes, "a [1541] statue of Charles [the Holy Roman Emperor and Charles I of Spain] depicted a vanquished Moor, a Native American and a Turk." Richards also details that printed and

engraved pictorial representations of the savage reinforced this concept (1995, 38). The closest critical examination found relating to Native Americans as the Other stems from Allen Carey-Webb's 1998 study. Here, he argues that in the sixteenth-century play *El Nuevo Mundo*, "the recognition of difference between the Spaniard and Indian tends to highlight Indian inferiority and justify systems of colonial administration and instruction" (1998, 36). Webb reaches the conclusion that the play demonstrates a pattern of ill treatment by the Spaniards towards the native females. Webb terms this pattern the Malinche model. In this model he writes, there exists

the notion of intelligent submission: knowing full well who the Spaniards are and what they desire the *india* allies herself with the conquerors, opening soul, heart and body to their designs. The portrayal of a willful submission supports the usurpation of the bodies of indigenous men and women into slavery" (1998, 36).

Historical chronicles of exploration fail to confirm the Malinche model, but they utilize their own: Othering through description and Othering through action.

This paper examines the Other in the chronicles of conquistadors Álvaro Núñez Cabeza De Vaca, Vásquez De Coronado and Hernando De Soto through their perception and utilization of indigenous females. An examination of their narratives indicates that the authors who wrote their works to curry political favor Othered the Native Americans through their descriptions, though on the Coronado expedition, Castañeda referenced a few instances of Othering through action. However, it is De Soto's writers who provide historians an unvarnished glimpse of Othering through action. The reason for this also lies in their reasons for authoring their works. Rangel's brutal honesty demonstrates his desire to propagate the image of weak opponents in order to increase the appeal of colonization of *La Florida* to the crown. Elvas' choice to remain anonymous indicates that he wrote without fear of repercussions, thus relieving the need for personal censorship. However, this does not mean that authors writing for political recognition were innocent in their actions, as Castañeda's account illustrates. His journey, when compared to De Vaca's indicates that military strength determined the Spaniard's approach, either through description or through action, to Othering.

Two of these men, De Soto and Coronado, were contemporaries searching different parts of the present day southern United States for, *El Dorado*, the city of gold. De Coronado's expedition departed Mexico City in 1542. He and a group of 335 Spaniards, 1300 natives and four Franciscan friars travelled north through the territory of New Spain into present day Arizona, New Mexico, Iowa, Kansas and Texas.<sup>2</sup> Despite the men's best attempts, they failed to find the fabled cities of gold. De Soto travelled in the opposite direction of De Coronado, travelling through present day Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North

<sup>2</sup> The number of Spaniards stems from Winshop's introduction to Castañeda's work. See Castañeda, 32-34; Castañeda listed several places the expedition visited in his account. He relates his trip to Cibola (34), Tiguex (62) and Quivira (76). There is much debate over the modern day locations of these places.

**The Accounts and  
their Literary  
Context**

Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois, Missouri and Arkansas during the years of 1539-42.<sup>3</sup> He too searched for *El Dorado*, but failed to find it. Natives in Arkansas killed him after a multitude of abuses (Clayton 1994, under “How the Governor Went From Tulla to Aqutiamquem Where He Wintered”). These men’s patrons deemed both expeditions unsuccessful because they failed to reach their objective, which was to find *El Dorado*, the city of gold the conquistadors believed De Vaca was hiding (Watkins 2011).

De Vaca belonged to the ill-fated 1527 expedition commanded by Pánfilo Navárez, which shipwrecked off the Texas coast in 1528. Here, he and three other men grappled with nature, starvation and disease to survive. Without the help of the natives, the men were doomed to death (De Vaca 1904, 60). Therefore, De Vaca became reliant on the natives for everything related to survival. Using this reliance as an advantage, the natives forced De Vaca into a variety of roles within indigenous society (69). Eventually, he learned of other Spaniards nearby and escaped to find them. (167). After he reunited with his fellow countrymen, De Vaca and his companions were used as bait to capture the natives, for slavery. Their capture enraged De Vaca and so he arranged for the captives to escape (170, 174). After the natives’ flight, De Vaca met Melchor Diaz, *Alcalde*, or magistrate, of the province of Culiacan (175). From there, De Vaca and his companions journeyed to Mexico City to relate their tale of survival to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (183).

The story of the Navárez expedition was disseminated in many ways. An official version of it, known as the *Joint Report*, appeared in 1539 (xv). A thorough personal account of the expedition, *La Relación* (The Relation), which De Vaca wrote, appeared just three years later (xv). The scholarly community lacks a whole scale study concerning the validity of it. Both historian Mariah Wade and translator Fanny Bandelier caution against interpreting De Vaca’s version of events as entirely accurate due to its sensual proximity and foggy recollections of events (xv; Wade 1999, 333). De Vaca composed the work from memory after returning to Spain, without the help of field notes. Another obvious flaw, which deserves a thorough examination (well beyond the scope of this study), is the coincidental timing of the writing and De Vaca’s need to finance a gold expedition in Paraguay (Wood 2002, 264). He published another memoir, *Naufragios* (Shipwrecks), of his three year stay in 1555, which appears to be a reprint of the 1542 edition with only minor changes. Once more, personal finances probably played a role in its publication. Repairing his reputation also might have been a motivating factor behind the 1555 work, given his extensive personal and legal troubles during this time (264). Despite his underlying bias in the writings, his account is the only full length one of the Navárez expedition. A comparison of the *Joint Report*, *La Relación* and *Naufragios* reveal only minute differences between them. This suggests that the historical scholars must take De Vaca’s account at face value. However, his underlying motives for writing also deserve consideration in analysis.

<sup>3</sup> There is much debate over the modern day locations of the names De Soto’s chroniclers assign to various geographical areas.

### Othering Through Description

By far, the most comprehensive narrative of the Coronado expedition stems from Pedro Castañeda, who was part of the journey. He wrote his work *The Journey of Coronado*, in the 1560's but it was lost and another copy was written upon his return to Spain in 1596. There it lay buried in the archives in manuscript form, until its translation into French during the nineteenth century (PSI 2008). Despite Castañeda's clear anticipation of criticism, historians have failed to fully analyze his tale for accuracy (Castañeda 1904, xxx-xxxi). Understanding that personal motives underlie this work, one must assume that despite Castañeda's declarations of truthfulness, his work is a one sided version of events. Thus, the Spaniards' actions concerning native treatment are white washed. Particularly disturbing is the poor treatment of natives Castañeda cites. It leaves one wondering of the horrors left unwritten.

Two primary accounts of De Soto's expedition appear as the authoritative accounts of De Soto and his men's travels. Rodrigo Rangel transcribed the events of the journey in his work, *Account of the Northern Conquest and Discovery of Hernando De Soto*. It is the closest to De Soto's personal story as one can obtain, other than De Soto's letters and reports to officials in Cuba and Spain. Rangel served as De Soto's personal secretary along the trip and wrote his work from a diary that he kept during the expedition. Presumably, Rangel authored the work shortly after his return. Historians consider it the most accurate of the accounts of De Soto's expedition (Clayton 1994, 231). An unknown author, who called himself a Gentleman from Elvas, relayed another report of the expedition in his 1557 work (Clayton 1994, xxxvii). The author never reveals his identity, but historians believe that he was a Portuguese officer who took part in the expedition (Sheppard 2011). The work corresponds almost directly to Rangel's version. While written for different purposes, the correlation between the two tales suggests that these chronicles are as close to a true recollection of events as possible.

De Vaca and Castañeda wrote their works for political glory. As a result, these men Othered the indigenous females primarily through illustration, though a close reading of Castañeda's work also demonstrates some instances of Othering through action. Certain statements in his work indicate that the behavior of Coronado's men differed little from the brutality exhibited by De Soto's men. The reason for their savage actions lies in the position of military strength these men were in, in comparison to De Vaca who was reliant on the natives for survival. De Soto's chroniclers demonstrate the above statement, while Castañeda attempts to downplay it. These polarized accounts of the treatment of native females by the conquistadors stem from the authors intentions for writing.

Both De Vaca and Castañeda portrayed native women in terms of their differences from the Europeans. Focusing solely on their contrasts, they Othered the natives through their description of female indigenous work ethic, dress, sexuality and marriage rituals. These men turned indigenous females, in the eyes of the sixteenth-century reader, into exotic objects found in the new world, as the Other. Furthermore, through implicit comparisons to the enemies of the Spaniards, Castañeda depicted the native people as those of an inferior race.

Castañeda juxtaposed the two cultures through his description of indigenous female dress. He marveled at the differences in the material used to sew the women's clothes, commenting that they made their clothing from the hides of animals. Also of note were the females bare arms, which was a style worn only by prostitutes in Europe (see appendix, fig. 1). "The women wore cloaks over their small under petticoats, with sleeves gathered up at the shoulders," he reported. The author continued to Other the indigenous females through a comparison to enemies of the Christian Spaniards. He wrote that they "wore something like little *sanbenitos* with a fringe," which were reminiscent of the Reconquest (1904, 71). These were the "badge put upon converted Jews [the Moors] brought out of the Inquisition (see appendix, fig. 2) (1904, 71). Through his portrayal of indigenous female dress Castañeda Othered them. He illustrated a society different and inferior to that of the Spaniards. Through his representation of native clothing, he depicted an invisible line between the Spaniards and the Native Americans. Castañeda's writing reinforced the sixteenth-century belief that the gulf between civilizations in terms of modernity and ideals was too great for the two races to be of equal footing.

From about the eighth century to the sixteenth-century, the Spaniards cast the Moors as the established Other. In the literature of this era, scholar Israel Burshatin comments that the "depictions fall between two extremes. On the vilifying side, Moors are hateful dogs, miserly, treacherous, lazy and overreaching. On the idealizing side, the men are noble, loyal, heroic and courtly" (1985, 115). Castañeda explicitly transferred the characteristics of the Moors into his description of indigenous females. One native female, he reported "had her chin painted like a Moorish woman" (1904, 69). Regarding the women of Sonora he wrote, "Women paint their chins and eyes like the Moorish women of Barbary. They are great sodomites" (1904, 89). While Castañeda certainly was not implying that these women were sodomites because of their dress, his choice to describe both indigenous female appearance and their sexual practices in the same paragraph is revealing of the Spanish opinion of the established Other, the Moors. These illustrations are also exceptionally telling of Castañeda's interpretation of native people as subhuman. By associating indigenous females with an inferior race, such as the Moors, he implicitly defined these women as inferior to Spaniards.

Both men who wrote for political glory chose to depict indigenous women as exotic and erotic through a discussion of customs relating to them. The men marveled at practices relating to marriage within indigenous society. One such tradition was that of polygamy, which did not exist in acceptable European society (De Vaca 1904, 56; Castañeda 1904, 85). Castañeda wrote in horror, "they [the natives] are great sodomites, and have many wives, even when they are sisters" (1904, 85). The only experience the Europeans had with such a custom was in other cultures, which they had conquered (Bacharach and Meri 2005, 861). Instances of intermarriage also astounded the men. De Vaca wrote a lengthy passage concerning the tribe of Mariame's customs of marrying their females to neighboring tribes, instead of marrying them within their own tribe (Castañeda 1904, 85). Castañeda also elaborated on the custom of intermarriage in a detailed passage relating to the purchase of wives and the consummation of marriage:

The custom is for the husbands to buy the women whom they marry, of their fathers and relatives at a high price, and then to take them to a chief, who is considered to be a priest, to Deflower them and see if she is a virgin (1904, 85).

His description of native sexuality is not an isolated one. A festival among the natives is relayed, where women who have chosen to remain unmarried participate in an orgy and afterwards “these women cannot refuse anyone who pays them a certain amount agreed on this” (85). In yet another province, he wrote that virgins went about unclothed until married (118). Rituals such as these, relating to sexuality and marriage befuddle the authors throughout their works. De Vaca wrote of a region where it was “the custom of not cohabitating with their wives when these are pregnant, and until the child is two years old” (De Vaca 1904, 117). He also discussed the custom of informal divorce in this region (118). By expounding on the perceived strangeness of customs and rituals relating to native sexuality and marriage, Castañeda and De Vaca Othered the native race through description.

They further Othered them through their descriptions of indigenous female labor. According to these men, native women were much more hardworking and industrious than their European counterparts. De Vaca marveled at the physical labor performed by indigenous females, a sight that was uncommon in sixteenth-century Europe (65). Not only did the women toil exceptionally hard, they also performed construction tasks that European males typically carried out, including the building of homes (143). The long hours of work performed by them also astounded him. “They [the native females] get only six hours rest,” he wrote (90). Castañeda similarly illustrated native women as exceptionally hard workers. The labor intensive process of grinding corn amazed him. He was especially impressed with the care the native women showed in maintaining sanitary preparation conditions (1904, 100-101). The shock and bewilderment of these men regarding indigenous female labor only served to reinforce the belief that the natives were the Other.

These authors description of native women fed into a sixteenth-century controversy. These men sought to popularize their works and curry favor with Spanish politicians. They implicitly weighed in on the political correctness of the concept of the Other, through their illustration of native women. They designed their renderings to support the objectification of native peoples, an issue that Bartolome De Las Casas publicized in his scathing 1542 work, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. The conquistadors brutality that Las Casas reported shocked and disturbed public and political leaders alike, but some sixteenth century thinkers refused to acknowledge the natives as anything other than the Other. They reasoned that, if the natives were the Other, then they could view them as inhuman, and objects meant for utilization by the Spaniards (Goldberg 1993, 25). Portraying these women as hard working, but different from the Europeans, De Vaca and Castañeda propagated this kind of logic. They undermined their status as people, depicted them as tools to labor with, and validated the mentality of the Other, regardless of whether they personally agreed with such policies. De Vaca’s later criticisms of colonial policy demonstrate his disapproval, along with his disillusionment of Spanish colonial policy.

### Otherring Through Action

However, at the time the authors wrote their accounts, they desired to curry political favor. Therefore, supporting colonial policy was one way in which to gain it (Traboulay 1994, xi).

Both Rangel and Elvas' description of the De Soto expedition fails to follow this trend, but the reason for that also lies in the authors intentions. Neither planned for their works to result in political glory. As a result, they fail to parallel the public relations campaign that De Vaca and Castañeda's chronicles take on. Instead of gaining favor with politicians by publicly applauding the mentality of the Other, these conquistadors demonstrated Otherring through action. According to the writings, De Soto and his men routinely utilized indigenous women in ways they never would have considered acceptable with Europeans. Instead of questioning the acceptability of the Other, as Las Casas did, these men perpetuated the horrors that so enraged Las Casas.

Another way in which the Spaniards acquired native women was as gifts, or as exchanges. According to Rangel, when the Spaniards visited the Cocoa region the Spaniards were given "*tamemes* [carriers] and twenty Indian women," in the hopes that the Spanish would leave the region peacefully (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Went From Pacaha to Quiguat and to Coligoa and Arrived at Cayas"). In the Casiqui region, Rodrigo Rangel, a companion of Elvas, reported that the Spaniards used the women as commodities, exchanging two of them for two shirts (Clayton 1994, under "In Which is Related What Happened to the Adelantado Hernando De Soto with the Cacique of Tascalusa"). When De Soto encountered the leader of Casiqui, the *cacique* offered his daughter as a token of alliance (Clayton 1994, under "How the Cacique of Pacaha Came in Peace"). The Spaniards perceived their receipt of the native women to be a voluntary contribution on the leader's part. This distinguished the indigenous race from them, the Spaniards reasoned. The only instance of the exchange of people that they were familiar with, was that of the medieval Other, the Moors. The conquistadors accepted the native females as another Other with ease, as is evidenced by Rangel's account of De Soto's actions when he reached Mabila. Here, he had the audacity to ask of a gift of "*tamemes* and one hundred Indian women." Upon receipt of De Soto's request, the *cacique* gifted him four hundred *tamemes*, but still De Soto was unsatisfied. He insisted on a gift of one hundred women, which resulted in a battle (Clayton 1994, under "In Which is Related What Happened to the Adelantado Hernando De Soto with the Cacique of Tascalusa"). De Soto's hoarding of native females resulted in a strain on the indigenous population, angering the *cacique*. To these men native females were simply the Other, subhuman and a substitute for currency.

When gifts failed to satisfy the demand for females, the Spaniards acquired the Native Americans in much the same way they did the medieval Other – through capture.<sup>4</sup> Throughout their chronicles, both Elvas and Rangel repeatedly reference Spaniard enslavement of indigenous females, and lack remorse for it. These allusions are casual,

<sup>4</sup> Christian Spaniards also experienced enslavement by the Moors in cases of defeat. For an excellent discussion of Spanish enslavement of the Other, see: (Kamen 1999, 197). For examples of the converse, see: (Thomas 1999, 37).

garnering little elaboration by the authors. They depict a group of conquistadors who kidnapped native females for no apparent reason, other than the fact that they believed that it was their inalienable right to do so (Clayton 1994).

To the conquistadors, the act of capture was so inconsequential that occasionally they even forgot to mention the act of doing so. For example, at *Mal Paz*, Bad Peace, Elvas reported that the Spaniards are tricked into releasing 28 hostages, including women, but the chroniclers fail to explain how they were acquired (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Reached Caliquen"). This omission does not appear to be intentional, as other records of this era reference multiple cases of the act of capture. This speaks volumes. The fact that the chroniclers filled pages discussing the landscape of the new world but failed to mention capturing 28 people suggests that to the Spaniards, the act of capture was routine and even expected.

The reported frequency of captures demonstrates the popular mentality regarding the Other that the Spaniards held. Elvas mentioned over 20 instances of enslavement of native females in his chronicle. This is probably only a fraction of those that took place. Both of De Soto's chroniclers reference the kidnapping of females as acts of revenge against the indigenous peoples (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Went From Aguacay"). Rangel reported that the frequency of the enslavement of indigenous women caused the leader of Casiqui to complain to De Soto that he and his men's behavior would "destroy those women and children who love [their] God so much" (Clayton 1994, under "In Which the History Relates Another Encounter With a Barricade"). After capturing females, it was custom for the conquistadors to ship the top specimens to Cuba for inspection, where they functioned as a sideshow of entertainment for the upper echelons of Spanish society, Elvas reported (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Arrived at Palache"). Those that failed to make the passenger list of the ship were doomed to a miserable existence much the same as the others that the Spaniards had subdued. Just as during the Reconquest, the roles the enslaved other played, depended on the skills they exhibited and the logistical needs of the captors (Kamen 1999, 197). Sometimes the Spaniards utilized them as guides (Clayton 1994, "How the Governor Went From Nondacao to Soacatino and Guasco"). In other cases, they performed the role of *tamames*, carriers, transporting the Spaniards supplies to various destinations (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Arrived at Palache"). However, sixteenth-century critics did not lament over the logistical uses of them. Instead, they worried about their treatment.

The treatment of these women validates Las Casas' objections to perceiving them as the other. Scholar David Traboulay writes, "What Las Casas described was, from the perspective of the Indians, a state that practiced terror. Indian slavery was but one form of terror" (1994, 179). De Soto's brutal actions towards his female captives certainly demonstrate the truth in the above statement. The Spaniards treated them like animals. Elvas depicted a scene describing the transport of female captives with disturbing casualness. "These Indians they took along in chains with collars about their necks and they were used for carrying the baggage and grinding the maize and for other services," he wrote (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Arrived at Palache). In addition to such

demoralizing treatment, sexual abuse of these women was rampant among the ranks of the conquistadors. “They wanted the women also in order to make use of them and for their lewdness and lust, and that they baptized them more for their carnal intercourse,” Rangel documented (Clayton 1994, under “And How They Went Onward and How a Christian Called Rodriguez and a Black Man”). The inclusion of details relating to sexual relations between the Spaniards and their captives reveals the frequency of it. It is also illustrative of the social acceptability of such things in Spain. The nonchalant tone of the authors indicates that these cases of abuse are not isolated instances. Presumably, if the chroniclers omitted the capture of 28 people, then the mere mention of sexual abuse indicates that it occurred with some frequency.

The acts of rebellion proliferated by the native female captives supports this conclusion. During the battle of Mabila, which stemmed from De Soto’s request for One Hundred women, they defied established gender boundaries and participated as warriors alongside the males of the village, in order to escape enslavement (Clayton 1994, under “In Which is Related What Happened to the Adelantado Hernando De Soto with the Cacique of Tascalusa,”). Captivity was not an uncommon practice among the natives. Acts of raiding and the capture of females as spoils of conquest repeatedly occurred between the indigenous groups (Reid 2009, 52). Yet, when this occurred, females relied on the males of the village for protection. Their participation against the Spaniards indicates that they were well aware of the fate awaiting them if captured. Punishments such as being fed to the dogs, a favorite among the Spaniards in cases of disobedience, must have reached their ears (Clayton 1994, under “How the War Began to Kindle”). When presented with the opportunity, indigenous female captives fought valiantly to escape. Rangel’s description of such a case best illustrates this: One Indian woman took a baciller named Herrera, who was alone with her and behind his other companions, and she seized him by the genitals... It was not that he wished to have intercourse with her as a lustful man, but rather that she wished to liberate herself and flee (Clayton 1994, under “How the Governor Hernando De Soto Went Forward in His Conquest”)

The captive’s behavior indicates that Las Casas was correct that practiced terror occurred when the Spaniards Othered the indigenous people through action. Potential enslavement by the Spaniards caused the defiance of established native gender roles, suggesting that treatment must have been especially brutal towards their captives.

De Vaca failed to discuss sinister actions by the Spaniards against indigenous females in his narratives. Perhaps this is because he simply did not perform them. The exact relationship between the Spaniards and the native females depended on the circumstances in which the men found themselves. When the Spaniards found themselves in situations in which they held military power over indigenous groups, Othering through action occurred, as opposed to Othering through description in cases of military inferiority. In De Vaca’s case, at the beginning of his expedition, he was militarily superior to the natives. Here, he alludes to capturing native females (De Vaca 1904, 28). However, there is only one mention of this. The remainder of his narrative indicates his reliance on the natives for survival. Thus,

this dependence, as well as a lack of written evidence, dictates that he treated them with respect.

Like the other conquistadors, Da Vaca relied on the native females as guides. However, his treatment of them is the polar opposite of the far more militarily superior, explorers like De Soto. Twice in his work, Da Vaca mentioned using them as such. Contrary to the treatment of native females mentioned in De Soto's chronicles however, De Vaca did not utilize these women as guides under duress. In each case, the women joined De Vaca willingly. His description of these encounters strikes the modern reader. Upon meeting a small group of native females, De Vaca wrote, "We called them and they approached us in great fear" (115). The key word in the preceding statement is the word approached. This indicates willingness by the indigenous females, albeit a fearful one, to encounter the Spaniards. In another encounter, De Vaca wrote, "We left, nevertheless, and soon the women followed with others of the village" (128). Here the key term is followed. This too indicates a willingness on the part of the indigenous females to join the De Vaca expedition. In contrast, Elvas, De Soto's chronicler, wrote, "an Indian woman, who had been captured at Nishone, guided him" (Clayton 1994, under "How the Governor Arrived at Palache"). While De Vaca's description of using women as guides indicates they were willing participants, Elvas' story indicates the converse. This demonstrates that De Vaca's expedition did not display the same sinister behavior that De Soto's men exhibited towards indigenous females.

It is likely that the Coronado expedition followed De Soto's behavior, though Castañeda could not afford to admit this. Castañeda mentions the capture of indigenous women in his narrative but with far less frequency than De Soto's chroniclers do. He indicates two instances of capture on the expedition in comparison to the twenty that Elvas indicated. Yet, this is not because it happened with less frequency. These accounts demonstrate that cases of military superiority resulted in capture of indigenous groups. Castañeda omitted direct references to sinister actions, but his casual allusions imply the frequency of enslavement. It is interesting that Castañeda cites only five instances of cross cultural interaction between the Spaniards and the indigenous women but of these, three of them reference cases of abuse of capture. To admit inhumane treatment validated Las Casa's criticisms and Castañeda could not afford the scrutiny that such descriptions would cause. However, an outright lie was certain to discount the validity of his chronicle. As a result he refrained from mentioning cross cultural exchanges, except when necessary and the half truths revealed is a disturbing indication of the behavior of the men on the Coronado expedition.

### Concluding Thoughts

The difference between Othering through description and Othering through action originates from the varying military positions in each of the conquistadors' expeditions. In De Vaca's case, he relied on the natives for survival, but this was not the case on Coronado or De Soto's journeys. De Vaca illustrated the natives as the Other, but as a result of his dependence on them, treated them humanely. Castañeda pretended that he had, but when critically analyzed, careless statements in his work show otherwise. Certainly, the three instances of capture Castañeda relayed, were not isolated instances, given his

casual mention of them. The difference between explicitly Othering through action, as in De Soto's chronicles, and a white washed account of the conquistadors' actions, as in Castañeda's narrative lies in the authors motivations.

Othering through description was one way for the conquistadors to justify, and thus glorify, their exploits in the eyes of Spanish politicians. To exonerate the imperial actions of the Spaniards, one had to legitimize the conquest of indigenous peoples. Yet, as critics like Las Casas argued, if the native peoples were capable of conversion, as only man could be Christianized, then they were human. This meant that the Spaniards' conquest and treatment of the native peoples was inherently wrong. Because one of the reasons for conquest contained in the Alexandrian Papal Bulls was that of the spread of Christianity, the crown could not deny their existence as human (Blaney 2010, 131). But, if the natives were human, then the Spaniards' behavior towards them was inexcusable. Therefore, De Vaca and Castañeda found it politically advantageous to Other the natives through description. As the Other, the conquest and enslavement of them was justifiable.

Both men depicted the natives as the Other through their illustration of indigenous females. These political pets illustrated them in a variety of ways. They examined them in relation to their work ethic, dress, sexuality and cultural rituals associated with it. In their portrayal, both De Vaca and Castaneda highlighted indigenous females in terms of their differences from the Europeans. These natives were both exotic and erotic. Castañeda transferred preexisting prejudices against the Moors to the indigenous females through his comparison of them. These men sought financial recognition for their exploits, but to gain it they had to validate them. This meant legitimizing the Spaniards' actions of imperialism. Therefore, they framed the natives as subhuman, lacking culture and civilization, as the Other they were justified in conquering.

While both men perpetuated the Other, it was Castañeda who illustrated the Other in action. The evidence for this lies in the casual statements made in his chronicle referencing the treatment of indigenous females. However, Castañeda attempted to downplay his actions through his infrequent mention of cross cultural interaction. Yet, when encounters between the two cultures are discussed in his chronicle, more than sixty percent of them indicate cases of abuses of power.<sup>5</sup> The reason for the transformation of Othering through description and Othering through action lies in the military strength of the Coronado expedition, in comparison to De Vaca's. De Vaca was one of three shipwrecked men, while the Coronado expedition contained more than 300 conquistadors (University of Texas, n. d.). Many on the Coronado excursion possessed weapons the indigenous people knew nothing of. As a result, the Spaniards on this journey abused their strength. They justified their actions to themselves and to society by Othering through description.

De Soto's chroniclers, Elvas and Rangel, openly portrayed abuses of power by the Spaniards. De Soto, like Coronado, brought a small army of conquistadors, carrying

<sup>5</sup> Put another way, three of the five instances of cross cultural interaction Castañeda referenced indicate capture.

unknown weapons, with him. However, unlike Castañeda, De Soto's writers wasted little time with the niceties of defining the natives as the Other. Instead, their works are fraught with instances of Spanish abuses against indigenous females. This suggests two things. First, popularity was not the authors' purpose. Their conveyance of events equated a public relations nightmare for the Crown, who was struggling with indigenous treatment already, due to criticisms by critics like Las Casas. These authors lack remorse for their actions. This offers a second point, namely, the frequent mention of abuse in these documents. Their lack of justification suggests that the conquistadors believed that such acts were acceptable to a large portion of literate Spanish society. As a result, these men fail to Other through description, but instead Other through action.

A thorough study of all four narratives reveals two generalizations in literary imagery regarding native females. One is Othering through description. This appears in the chronicles of Da Vaca and Castañeda, Coronado's chronicler. In De Vaca's case, the reason for this is his reliance on the natives. But, in Castañeda's rendition of the Coronado expedition, it is his purpose in writing. He serves as the bridge between the Othering through description and action, though he struggled not to. Joining this second group meant encountering scathing criticism, which would derail him from meeting his objective: obtaining financial compensation. While a cursory glance at his work suggests solely Othering through description, an intense scrutiny reveals that it also belongs to the Othering through action. Also joining him in this group are De Soto's two chroniclers, Elvas and Rangel. Compared to that of De Vaca, they reveal that Othering through action correlated directly with the military strength of the men on the expeditions.

## Appendix



**Fig. 1.** Typical dress of a sixteenth century native American female. From Cheryl Lucente in “Indiana Conquest Trails,” Donald Sheppard, accessed March 15, 2011. <http://www.floridahistory.com/indiana.html>.



**Fig. 2.** The badge of Saint Benedict, a sanbenito. From “The Order of Saint Benedict: The Medal of Saint Benedict,” Saint Johns Abbey, accessed March 15, 2011. <http://www.osb.org/gen/medal.html>.

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## Öz

### **Betimleme Yoluyla Ötekileştirme ve Eylem Yoluyla Ötekileştirme: Motivasyonunun Yerli Kadınların Algılanması Üzerine Etkileri ve Yerli Kadınların Onaltıncı Yüzyıl İstilacı Yazınında Ele Alınması**

Kültürel Klişeleştirme, ya da başka bir deyişle Ötekileştirme, kültürler arası iletişimin olduğu her ortamda insan doğası gereği ortaya çıkan bir durumdur. Yazar bu çalışmasında İspanyol İstilacılar Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, Vazquez de Coronado ve Hernando Soto'nun tarihsel kayıtlarını incelemiş ve bu belgelerin Yerli Amerikalı Kadınlarını ötekileştiren bir çok açık ve üstü kapalı unsur taşıdığını ortaya koymuştur. Bahsi geçen belgelerden anlaşıldığı üzere, bu eserlerin yazılmasının ardında gizli bir amaç yattığında ya da bahsi geçen istilacıların askeri üstünlük sağlayamadıkları durumlarda ötekileştirme üstü kapalı bir şekilde ve betimleyici bir nitelik taşımaktadır. Askeri üstünlüğün sağlandığı ve eserler gizli bir amaç doğrultusunda kaleme alınmadıklarında ise ötekileştirme açık bir şekilde ve eylem sonucu gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ötekileştirme olgusunu sadece betimleme yoluyla gerçekleştirenler çağdaşları tarafından eleştiriye maruz kalmamışlardır. Ancak, ötekileştirmeyi eylem sonucu gerçekleştiren isyancılar keskin eleştirilere maruz kalmışlardır. Sonuç olarak, bu istilacıların eylemleri Onaltıncı yüzyılda Yerli Amerikalıların insanlığına dair bir çok tartışmanın ortaya çıkmasına sebep olmuşlardır.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Öteki, istilacı, Amerikan yerlileri, kadınlar, kültürler-arası etkileşim

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