

Honor, Fatherhood, and Power in the Journals of Don Diego de Vargas

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In the last days of summer in 1693, don Diego de Vargas sent public edicts throughout the complex of adobe pueblos at El Paso del Norte on the eastern bank of the Rio del Norte, the contemporary Rio Grande. After the sounding of a war drum at every settlement, Sebastián Rodríguez read de Vargas's proclamation. De Vargas specifically spoke to the refugees who had come to El Paso thirteen years earlier - after the Pueblo Revolt that dislodged the Spanish from northern New Mexico. De Vargas promised them that at his own expense they would be fed and transported to the region that he had "left humbled and conquered" the previous winter. All residents of El Paso who chose to recolonize the upriver territory of New Mexico were assured that de Vargas would "encourage and furnish the greatest assistance."¹

It is impossible to discuss the process of Spanish colonization in the Americas without discussing masculinity, specifically paternity. For the paternalistic viceregal government of New Spain, this announcement served two purposes. First was legally securing the right to re-establish a Spanish presence in Santa Fe. The letter also served as a contract and advertisement of de Vargas's legitimacy as the father of the reconquest. The conquest of every part of the Spanish Empire in the Americas resulted in the generation of a *casta* society, made up of individuals of varying racial admixture between Spaniards and Indigenous peoples or enslaved Africans. In New Mexico, on the far northern frontier, this racial admixture was also present. This borderlands society had masculine reputation and honor at the heart of its networks of slavery and kinship, which defied other paternalistic rhetoric about Indian privileges as royal subjects. Spaniards and *castas* viewed the rescue or purchase of captives, Indian or not, as a manly duty. Even for Spaniards, mixed race families made up a demographic majority as a result of this system in New Mexico.²

Diego de Vargas negotiated between masculine expectations in the public and private sphere. De Vargas came to New Mexico from a series of government positions similar to those held by his father, who had served as a viceregal official. Raised in Spain, de Vargas left the Iberian Peninsula for opportunities in New Spain, Mexico. The relative weakness of de Vargas's familial authority contrasted against his official capacity and honor. De Vargas's remoteness from his family and his homeland played out over the course of his life. He paradoxically asserted his paternal authority, as the *pater familias* of his branch of the Vargases, while begging relatives in Spain to intercede for him with the distant royal court of the last Spanish Hapsburg, Carlos II. Near the end of his career de Vargas was recognized as the rightful commander of the fortress at Santa Fe. This status came at a price. De Vargas's final years were spent in legal entanglements, political rivalry, mourning, and imprisonment. His position as the distant patriarch of his family did little to improve his standing. De Vargas was, by Spanish legal and cultural expectation, the most powerful individual in his family, but this power meant little compared to the distance between his life in New Spain and the Iberian Peninsula.

Diego de Vargas represents a contradiction in gender expectations and authority present in the Spanish Colonial Atlantic world. This paper explores de Vargas's life along with the conflicts and paradoxes of his role as a father, both in absentia for his Spanish family and as a

¹ John L. Kessell, Rick Hendricks, Meredith Dodge, eds., *To The Royal Crown Restored* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992) 374-375.

² James F. Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

vessel for royal paternal stewardship.

I - A Historiographical Note

The last two decades of the seventeenth century saw many revolts against imperial authority on the northern frontier of the Spanish Empire.³ Pueblo people in New Mexico sought to reject the institutions of Spanish patrimony over their lives through militant resistance and succeeded. After both civil and ecclesiastical Spanish authorities demanded labor and food alongside conditions of leaving behind older ritual life, they had had enough. In the 1670s, revolts occurred in the Piro Pueblos south of Bernalillo resulting in their removal to missions at Paso del Norte. In 1680, Pueblo Indians successfully repelled the Spanish to the Paso del Norte complex. Then, “[i]n order to take away their baptismal names, the water, and the holy oils, they [plunge] into the rivers and wash themselves.”⁴ These rebellions upset the rhetorical paternal benevolence and concern that the Spanish imperial project asserted as its baseline relationship with Indians in their American Empire.

At the same time in peninsular Spain, another crisis of paternal domination occurred. Spaniards emigrated to the Americas, Philippines, and the Low Countries in large numbers, and during the last decade of the seventeenth century. Spain was largely depopulated of men, with 450,000 men arriving in the Americas alone during the 1680s and 1690s.⁵ Other conditions including lowered birthrates in peninsular Spain and cycles of crop failure also caused concerns that added to anxiety over gender in Spain during the seventeenth century.⁶ Women left in Spain were said by foreign observers to “have so much liberty that they often exceed the bounds of modesty and the limits of respectability.”⁷ Although legally masculine power remained the basis for law in Iberia the challenges to social order on the peninsula likely informed views of women and life in Spain. De Vargas’s position in the Americas remained negotiated like that of many others, but as a noble his financial and patriarchal responsibilities grant us a view into lived experiences of masculinity through a layer of social and gender crisis in the period. The revolts that wracked the Spanish Empire in the sixteenth century were part of a broader crisis that directly affected de Vargas. De Vargas’s public actions as representative of the Spanish crown and correspondence demonstrate how the conquest and resettlement of the northern frontier in the 1690s reflected this broader crisis of maintaining structures of paternal authority despite remoteness.

³ David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 133-146.

⁴ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 136.

⁵ Kessell et al, *The Royal Crown Restored*, 11.

⁶ Charlene Villasenor Black, “Love and Marriage in the Spanish Empire: Depictions of Matrimony and Gender Discourses in the Seventeenth Century,” *Seventeenth Century Journal* 32, no. 3 (Autumn): 662-663.

⁷ Marcelin Defourneaux, *Daily Life in Spain in The Golden Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 145-146.

II

The De Vargases were a family with a military and noble pedigree, having served the Spanish crown against Moors, Turks, and the French. Their status brought them close to the Spanish Crown, and as a result, they earned large holdings of land and involvement in networks of credit in early modern Spain. In 1703, a year before his death, Diego de Vargas' assets and properties included a large house and several other smaller houses in Madrid as well as a second large house in the Vargases' ancestral village of Torrelaguna. Along with these houses, de Vargas' agricultural wealth amounted to 500 acres of vineyards, grain-producing fields in Torrelaguna, olive orchards, *dehesas* or commonly held mixed-use lands. In a third category of wealth, de Vargas had a hand in the credit networks of early modern Spain. He owned yielding credit interests called *censos* in Madrid and Granada, *juros* or interest in public debt in several small villages, as well as other smaller holdings. This wealth existed as a source of tangible financial solvency, but also as a network of favors and credit, holding together the upper class Spaniards who surrounded de Vargas and his family.⁸ This wealth existed as only a part of de Vargas' estate. While there is no accounting of his holdings in the Americas, we can imagine that the cross-Atlantic migration of the de Vargases that started with don Diego's father. Alonso de Vargas, Diego de Vargas' father, left for the Americas after the death of his wife and father in 1647. According to John Kessell, Alonso may have been weighing his financial responsibilities as head of family when making that decision. The combined responsibility of his deceased wife and sister's future dowry may have been a factor in seeking a career in the Americas.⁹ Alonso de Vargas was appointed the *alcalde* of the *alcaldia mayor* of Chiapa in Guatemala. He then remarried, choosing a *Criolla* or American-born Spaniard as his wife. Their three children were classified not as *hijos naturales* or children out of wedlock, but as legitimate members of his family.¹⁰ After Alonso's death, Diego inherited his father's properties in Spain and jointly inherited his father's American properties with his half-siblings in Guatemala. This joint inheritance and the weight of managing his father's peninsular estate may have motivated de Vargas to immigrate to the Americas, following in his father's footsteps. Diego de Vargas left for New Spain in 1672, leaving behind his wife, Beatriz, and four children.

The promise of opportunity in the Americas also effectively changed de Vargas' position as the paternal authority of his family, de Vargas struggled to maintain his masculine honor across the Atlantic. In 1675, after the death of his wife, Diego de Vargas wrote his brother-in-law from New Spain. He petitioned Gregorio Pimentel del Prado to secure his children's financial future. Alongside sums to sustain his children, de Vargas also specifies that leftover money from his assets be used to continue his contributions to a fund for *memorias*, a religious endowment set up to pay the dowries of orphan girls at a Madrid *convento*.¹¹ Unable to directly minister to these financial issues, de Vargas wrote to his brother-in-law using the familiar pronoun, *tu*. This private expression of familiarity also speaks to an unspoken confidence between men.¹² Continuing his patronage of these *memorias* maintained de Vargas' good standing as a member of society, even as de Vargas himself occupied the governorship of the mining town of Teutila, south of Veracruz. Maintaining *memorias* was useful to de Vargas as

⁸ Black, 263-264.

⁹ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, 17.

¹⁰ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, 21-22.

¹¹ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, Letter 1, 127-128.

¹² Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, Letter 1, 330 (Spanish-language transcription).

a form of both paternal concern and a way to maintain an honorable stance in peninsular Spain. De Vargas personally pressed his brother-in-law to live up to his “nobility and Christian virtue” and humbly submitted that he did “not deserve that you favor me so. I shall serve you my brother and friend, in every way that I am able.”¹³

When tensions arose in this network of masculine and paternal honor, the tone of letters turned from one of caring familiarity to careful accusation. Despite his wealth and credit, de Vargas was unable to pay his daughter’s dowry of 10,000 pesos to her husband, Ignacio Lopez de Zarate. Their exchange of letters over the issue of the debt in 1690 is full of language meant to reassure on de Vargas’s part and raise concerns on Zarate’s over the issue of owed dowry. Preferring to maintain his good standing with his creditors, de Vargas assured Zarate that he had no way to pay the dowry immediately with cash.¹⁴ While striving to maintain masculine honor between the both of them de Vargas held his son-in-law – only four years younger than him – at arm’s length, referring to him incorrectly as a doctor in his first correspondence, and maintaining a formal tone with Zarate throughout their correspondences.¹⁵ In his 1703 assessment of de Vargas’s financial assets, Zarate had a final and triumphant settling of his side of their decade-long conflict. While rebuking any possible claims on his honor, Zarate forced de Vargas’s estate to remunerate him for breach of marriage contract at a rate of 500 pesos a year, finishing his letter with an appeal to de Vargas’s concern for his daughter and grandchildren.¹⁶ In the interest of maintaining their relationship, the letter presumably following is a repetition on Zarate’s part of “obeisance at the feet of Your Lordship.”¹⁷ The tension between Spanish culture’s expectations of de Vargas, as an ever-present patriarch and a gentleman, and the realities of his life in New Spain came to a head in his relative financial helplessness. This strange position, between expectation and reality, characterized the life of de Vargas.

III

As with other narratives of conquest, Spanish Imperial self-perception was based on masculine responsibility between Spanish men and the peoples they believed needed their paternal guidance and concern. Diego de Vargas wrote from Oaxaca that life in New Spain was “the same thing as being in wilderness” in 1675.¹⁸ This early pessimism about service in the Americas in the letters of de Vargas was balanced with the economic incentives of the Indies. “So I say in all this that Spain was but a stepmother to me, for she banished me to seek my fortune in strange lands,” de Vargas said in a letter to a distant relative. Despite the desolation of

¹³ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, Letter 1, 128.

¹⁴ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, Letter 7, 137-138.

¹⁵ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, 45-46.

¹⁶ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, Letter 48, 274-276.

¹⁷ Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare*, Letter 49, 279.

¹⁸ John Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease: The Journals of Don Diego de Vargas, New Mexico, 1697-1700* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), Letter 1, 128.

the Indies, de Vargas strove to hold himself to the responsibilities expected of him in Spain. "Here, I do what I could not do there, despite my inclination. I have asked for nothing more since I left my homeland."¹⁹ De Vargas capitalized on his responsibilities in Oaxaca, rising from a post in the small, mostly-Indian town of Teutila to the mining boom town of Tlapujahua. In 1688, Diego de Vargas submitted a petition to the viceroy to become governor-reconqueror of New Mexico. His petition, with the sum of 2,500 pesos to expedite it, was approved swiftly.²⁰

New Mexico was lost to Spanish control eight years before de Vargas's successful petition. A drought and religious suppression of the Pueblo people of the valley of the Rio del Norte (our Rio Grande) resulted in a violent uprising that had forced the Spaniards to retreat to El Paso del Norte in 1680. The success of the revolt echoed throughout the greater northern frontier and Indian revolts characterized the rest of the decade in New Spain.²¹

De Vargas's new title made him responsible for lands now under the rule of Pueblo people, and following the responsibilities concurrent with his title de Vargas made his way north to the complex of settlements at El Paso del Norte. The De Vargas entrada performed a reconnaissance and ritual repossession of New Mexico in 1692, traveling up the Rio del Norte and back down to conduct a muster of the residents of El Paso. The muster inquired about the families of the Paso del Norte complex, their family size, head of household, and readiness to head north to resettle New Mexico.²² Letters accompanying the muster proclaim the poverty and "nakedness" of the colony in exile. Using the results of the muster, the *cabildo* of Santa Fe in Paso del Norte begged the Conde de Galve, the viceroy, to fund a larger resettlement party.²³ Ignoring the *cabildo*, the viceroy gathered a *junto* or meeting of his officials and approved de Vargas's conquest, a remittance of 12,000 pesos for the reconquest, and issued an official thanks for de Vargas's efforts. By the next year de Vargas was in Zacatecas, far south of New Mexico, recruiting new colonists.

It was in Zacatecas that de Vargas sent a *memorial*, an official testimony, to the King of Spain. De Vargas depicted himself as the good father of the conquest. In his own words, de Vargas was fierce when he encountered resistance but forgiving and tender when proper submission to crown and his person were exhibited by the Indians of New Mexico. The narrative provided by de Vargas was of a tour through the pueblos of New Mexico, up and down the Rio del Norte and to the far western Hopi and Zuni pueblos. At almost every pueblo visited, de Vargas ordered his troops to shout, "Praise be to the Holy Sacraments." By de Vargas's accounting the majority of Indians he encountered answered as obedient subjects, "Forever." Despite being accompanied by a military force de Vargas claimed to face no serious armed resistance among the Pueblo people. De Vargas presented the Indians as lost children ready to be restored to the house of Spain. According to de Vargas when Pueblo people surrendered to him in Santa Fe and other northern pueblos he embraced them and laid rosaries over their necks, in the mesa-top pueblos of the Hopi and Zuni he became the *compadre* or godfather of several children. Describing to the king what he had accomplished in the *memorial* de Vargas listed as chief among his accomplishments the peaceful subdual and return to proper vassalage of the twenty-three pueblos of New Mexico, seventy-six captives freed, and 2,214 people baptized. Turning to the matter of financial expenditure, de Vargas compared his expedition to those of

¹⁹ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 2, 130-131.

²⁰ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 41-42.

²¹ Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* 134-137.

²² Kessell et al, *To the Royal Crown Restored*, 34-65.

²³ Kessell et al, *To The Royal Crown Restored*, 72-73.

previous would-be conquerors. De Vargas's *memorial* described prior entradas into New Mexico as needless wastes of royal money and the lives of Indians, always represented as wayward children and lost vassals of the king. De Vargas finally requested that the king consider him for a post somewhere in the empire, notably far from New Mexico.²⁴

The memorial to the king again underlines the differences between public and private perceptions of masculinity for the conqueror of New Mexico. At points in his memorial there are overtures toward affection for the Indians he returned to vassalage beneath the Crown. Contrastingly, de Vargas claimed that: "With my cunning, manner, and wisdom I took advantage in all the pueblos of the ruse of being the *compadre* not only of the heads and leaders but also of other Indians."²⁵ De Vargas's memorial represented one of the peaks of his career. The recolonization of New Mexico wound up as a swift fall from that peak.

De Vargas overestimated the willingness of Pueblo people to return to vassalage. Arriving in the winter of 1693, the settlers encountered a multi-story pueblo built atop the *casas reales* or old Spanish capital in Santa Fe. A siege at Santa Fe followed while the colonists from Zacatecas and the returning Spaniards and Indians from El Paso suffered illness and hunger. Written later, a letter to the viceroy, the Conde de Galve from the reestablished *cabildo* of Santa Fe made clear that the Indians, "had no intention of rendering complete obedience to his majesty and still less of reducing themselves to the counsels of the ministers of the gospel."²⁶ This conflict was presented by the *cabildo* as entirely at the hands of hostile pueblo people, wayward subjects of the crown and de Vargas who chose to resist violently. Although de Vargas was referred to in the letter, he was portrayed as a singularly honorable individual. Despite their possible discontent with the governor, the *cabildo* maintained his honor in their report and asked for a continuance of his governance.²⁷ De Vargas was still in the favor of the viceroy. The *cabildo*'s concern with de Vargas's honor had its limits, drawn by political expediency.

After five years of unrest, including a rebellion that left the settlers of New Mexico stranded in pockets up and down the Rio del Norte, the *cabildo* had changed its tune. In 1697 when the Conde de Galve was replaced by the Conde de Moctezuma the *cabildo* wrote a petition of formal complaint. The letter begins with a denunciation of de Vargas's sexual conduct, "when the governor and captain general entered El Paso to govern in 1691 he brought a woman with him as his mistress."²⁸ Not content with impugning de Vargas's personal sexual morality the *cabildo* also levied the charge that the governor had encouraged the soldiers at the presidio of Santa Fe to also live in sin, "As a result, this contagion has infected this kingdom worse than Sodom ever was."²⁹ In addition to the charges of moral misconduct, the *cabildo* also

²⁴ Kessell et al, *To The Royal Crown Restored*, 182-219.

²⁵ Kessell et al, *To The Royal Crown Restored*, 218.

²⁶ Kessell et al, *To The Royal Crown Restored*, 559.

²⁷ Kessell et al, *To The Royal Crown Restored*, 562-563.

²⁸ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*. 35.

²⁹ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 36.

systematically deconstructed de Vargas's reputation for cleverness and insight by citing the many ignored signs of the renewed rebellions, which wracked New Mexico two years before. The complaint against de Vargas questioned his paternal authority as a viceregal official. The fallout from the complaint resulted in the de Vargas's eventual imprisonment and the legal crisis that defined the last years of his life. The attacks on de Vargas's honor represented an important dimension of conflict between Spaniards on the far northern frontier. Rebelling against de Vargas would have been unthinkable in the precarious situation New Mexicans found themselves in, surrounded and outnumbered by Pueblo people and the semi-sedentary Apaches. Paternal authority, though, remained grounds for dismissal in the patriarchal world of the Spanish Empire.

De Vargas spent the last years of his life embroiled in political and legal struggle around his frontier service. This conflict swallowed up de Vargas's life for six years, during which he and others deployed attacks on character and upright manhood to make their points. De Vargas's continued alleged broken financial promises remained a major focus of concern. The financial responsibilities expected of De Vargas as a man of good standing remained a major avenue for attack. In their official letter of complaint dated January 2nd, 1697 to the Conde de Moctezuma, (the viceroy of New Spain from 1697 to 1701) the *cabildo* or ruling council of Santa Fe accused de Vargas of fiscal infidelity. According to the *cabildo*, de Vargas deserved no recognition other than as a burden on the coffers of the crown. Customarily, conquerors and explorers of New Spain were expected to furnish the costs of their expeditions personally, as a matter of personal honor and a display of the wealth and power an individual could command. According to the *cabildo*'s complaint de Vargas's costs for the reconquest had been only around 4,000 pesos where the crown's contribution to the campaign was around 68,000 pesos.³⁰ The complaint, ultimately found baseless by the Council of the Indies in Havana, neatly coincided with the appointment of the new viceroy. The previous viceroy, the Conde de Galve had favored de Vargas and the *cabildo* wrote in the hopes of deposing de Vargas. Along with this financial breach of trust, de Vargas was also accused of a deep breach of racial solidarity. According to the *cabildo*, de Vargas did not recruit Spaniards to serve as the soldiers in the *presidio* or fortress of Santa Fe, but rather had "enlisted many Blacks, mulattoes, and chinos"³¹ as well as French prisoners and used them to arrest and insult the Spanish citizenry of Santa Fe. This betrayal of the familial racial integrity held between Europeans and Euro-descended colonists remained an attack on patriarchal honor in Santa Fe, possibly promoting intermarriage and relation with racially unfit people. According to the *cabildo* De Vargas was an unfit representative for the paternal authority of the crown. De Vargas did not account correctly for his financial duty to the vassals of the crown and did not maintain his loyalty to the "family" of Spaniards who rightly deserved protection and opportunity from the crown.

Defending himself in personal letters and official statements to the Conde de Moctezuma, de Vargas drew upon his personal character and relation to networks of honor and credit. Existing as a man of both means and humility, de Vargas presented himself as having taken on the price of the reconquest with his own personal wealth. De Vargas admitted that his contribution to the effort to recolonize New Mexico was the previously stated 4,000 peso sum, but that his contribution covered the entirety of the expedition.³² De Vargas argued his contribution should be measured financial and the form of what was restored and added to Spanish settlement in the far north. De Vargas reiterated that he humbly earned the title of

³⁰ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 36-37.

³¹ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 39.

³² Kessell et al, *Remote Beyond Compare* 175-177.

governor and presidial captain “in name only and . . . at his own expense.”³³ The peninsular ideal of masculinity still maintained itself, at least in expectation, even on the furthest frontier of Spanish power. Paternal responsibility remained a major bedrock of the colonial project, despite external threats.

IV

In the same way that masculine honor held together cross-Atlantic financial structure, family structure and patriarchal authority maintained the social structures of the Spanish Empire. As with the financial dimension of his life, de Vargas experienced strain in his family, some of it resulting from financial burdens and the distance between de Vargas and his family in Spain. Other strain on the de Vargas’s family came from within, and different assertions of masculine authority created conflict within the family.

De Vargas served as a family head in exile, both powerful and at the mercy of others closer to his family. In his letter to his beloved brother-in-law, Gregorio Pimentel del Prado, upon the death of his wife, Beatriz, Diego de Vargas explicitly asked for help in raising his children and sought assurance that they had means to support themselves.³⁴ De Vargas’s trust in del Prado is implicit, and his brother-in-law unofficially acted as an agent for him in Spain, living in and maintaining de Vargas’s properties as well as reporting to de Vargas on changes in his land holdings.³⁵ His relationship with del Prado contrasted to that with his son-in-law, Ignacio Lopez.

Though thoroughly polite, the familial bond between Lopez and de Vargas was also strained by distance. After his marriage to de Vargas’s daughter Maria Isabel, Lopez gained legal definition as a head of family in Spain for de Vargas. De Vargas may have preferred del Prado as his agent, but Lopez had the legal right to manage familial affairs. Between begging forgiveness for a distant poverty and naming Lopez his legal representative in Spain, de Vargas was simultaneously at Lopez’s mercy and a father figure to the man.³⁶ De Vargas let a hint of his true feelings for his son-in-law out in a letter to his daughter, Isabel Maria, Ignacio’s wife. “I am amazed that he does not remember from letter to the next what he writes.”³⁷ This and other statements of frustration stand out in his correspondence with his daughter, whom he often addressed with simple language as if writing to the child he recalled.³⁸ Lopez also interacted with the rest of de Vargas’s family in Spain, perhaps emphasizing for de Vargas his relative powerlessness in family affairs. In his 1690 note to Lopez regarding Juan Manuel de Vargas Pimentel, his youngest son who desired to see his father in the Americas, the tension between de

³³ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease* 58-59.

³⁴ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 1, 127-128.

³⁵ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 12, 157-158.

³⁶ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letters 6, 7, 9, 10, and 12.

³⁷ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 26, 203.

³⁸ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 32, 217.

Vargas's familial position and his distance is clear:

Your Lordship tells me that my son would like to join me. To this I respond that not even were I at death's door would I entertain the thought of him doing such a thing ... The Indies are fine for those who sell in a store, but not for men of honor who flee the trades. This is a dangerous land.³⁹

Unable to restrain his son's desires, de Vargas appealed to honor and both his son and his son-in-law's sense of masculinity to beg that Juan Manuel not come to the Americas. New Spain was a place where Diego de Vargas paradoxically maintained and risked his honor. Despite all the honor and prestige that the de Vargases had accumulated in the Americas, de Vargas was painfully aware of the reality of his circumstances. Life in the Americas was not only dangerous, but distance from proper social standards in peninsular Spain also risked any Spaniard's good name. De Vargas himself had fallen into some of the laxity of morals that peninsular Spaniards associated with the Indies. He had started a family in Mexico long before Juan Manuel voiced his desire to come to New Spain.

Nothing is known about de Vargas's partner in Mexico other than her name, Nicolasa Rincon. She is mentioned once in a letter written by Juan Manuel, newly arrived in Mexico City. Disobeying his father's wishes, Juan Manuel arrived in Mexico City in 1699. There, he had a brief encounter (meriting only a sentence in a letter) with a young man who was "very like me in appearance." This young man, also named Juan Manuel de Vargas, was the son of Nicolasa Rincon. She and de Vargas had four children together. These *hijos naturales* were not mentioned in the vast majority of de Vargas's communications, most likely due to de Vargas attempting to project his honored role as family patriarch. Perhaps Juan Manuel de Vargas y Pimentel would have received his younger brother kindly if he had known of the young man and his family before. As it was, in Juan Manuel de Vargas y Pimentel's account of their meeting, the younger Juan Manuel was dismissed and ignored by Vargas y Pimentel. "Their mother sent [Juan Manuel] to welcome me and to offer her home, but I shall not see her."⁴⁰ The two sons of De Vargas would never have the opportunity to meet again, as the elder Juan Manuel died aboard a ship returning to Spain.

In a characteristically intimate letter to Gregorio Pimentel del Prado, de Vargas talked about his sorrow and frustration with his son. Perhaps aware of the interaction between the two Juan Manuels, de Vargas wrote of his older son's conduct in Mexico City to his brother-in-law, Gregorio Pimentel. First he acknowledged the deep grief he felt both at the loss of his son and his current legal situation, the endless cycle of defense and prosecution about de Vargas's financial situation. Enumerating his sufferings, de Vargas then turned to excoriating his son's behavior. The elder Juan Manuel was foolish and deceitful, de Vargas said. Having embarked to New Spain against his father's orders, he bluntly rebuked de Vargas's American family while he fathered an *hijo natural* of his own. De Vargas was furious to have only found out about his grandson when the family of the child's mother came to ask him to pay for her funeral. De Vargas also defended his choice to not marry Nicolasa Rincon. He stated that he would have preferred to marry into a poor noble family in Spain than to marry a woman of unknown status or even race in the Americas, a sentiment repeated in a later letter to Ignacio Lopez:⁴¹

³⁹ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 9, 147.

⁴⁰ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 25, 202.

⁴¹ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 53, 58.

It is certain that had I received news in that land and kingdom of my son's death, I would have chosen to marry in Spain someone of like temperament and my social equal, though I would not have asked for even a yard of ribbon from her. In Spain, the most impeccable nobility is that which has nothing. Being in this kingdom, and having been in New Spain, has made me not commit myself in order to freely go anywhere (Our Lord seeing fit).⁴²

The complications of fatherhood, masculinity, and space all wind through these correspondences, leaving de Vargas precariously perched between different expectations of his masculinity.

V

What had a lifetime of service to the crown garnered Diego de Vargas? A twenty-seven year absence from his family, a son-in-law to which was deeply in debt to handling his affairs in Spain, and a revolt of the civil authorities beneath him that actively worked to tear down his personal honor. Years of striving to live up to the standards of Spanish masculinity, of vigor, honor, and paternal authority from the Indies resulted in very little reward. Where de Vargas prospered was in maintaining his honor. His immaterial good name remained untarnished in the face of accusations from political enemies in New Mexico.

Following the complaint filed by the *cabildo* of Santa Fe, de Vargas faced a divided colony in New Mexico. His governorship came to an end around the same time that his patron, the Conde de Galve, left the position of viceroy. At the same time the new viceroy was petitioned by Pedro Rodriguez de Cubero, the head of a presidio in Cuba. Cubero asked that since de Vargas's appointed term was ending, if he could be appointed to governor of New Mexico. The viceroy assented.⁴³

De Vargas immediately filed an appeal on the viceroy's decision, citing his loyal service and his own importance to the continued security of the colony. His appeal circulated from the viceroy to the Council of the Indies to the king, Carlos II. The king's letter was the definitive legal sanction of de Vargas's character, "[T]he restoration of New Mexico [is] attributable first to divine providence and then to don Diego de Vargas's courage, devotion, and lack of self-interest." This commendation, impressive as it is, was followed by several special allowances for de Vargas, "I have further given don Diego a patent as pacificator, since it is my wish that all those who have been employed in such glorious duties should enjoy this, and the grant of a title of marques or conde in Castile, whichever one he chooses, for himself and his successors."⁴⁴

⁴² Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, Letter 53, 286.

⁴³ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 41-46.

⁴⁴ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 71-73.

Such a powerful commendation should have satisfied de Vargas, but paternalistic honor may have driven his continued engagement with the conflict. Instead, don Diego continued his litigation against Rodriguez Cubero. Upon taking his position as governor Rodriguez Cubero received a series of signed petitions of complaint from the residents of Santa Fe. All dealt with financial irregularities under de Vargas (his sexual misdoings quickly forgotten).⁴⁵ The volume of the petitions made Rodriguez Cubero unable to ignore the allegations, and in November of 1697 he ordered de Vargas pay back the 4,600 pesos in claims made against him by the *cabildo* on behalf of the residents of Santa Fe.⁴⁶ De Vargas's refusal to pay, filed by his Mexico City lawyers, set off further acrimony in Santa Fe.

At the worst of the conflict, de Vargas was imprisoned in his home in Santa Fe, his ally Alfonso Rael de Aguilar exiled, all while Juan Manuel de Vargas Pimentel awaited his father in Mexico City. In a letter to Juan Manuel, carried by Rael de Aguilar, don Diego refers to Rodriguez Cubero as a "baslisk," a highly venomous mythological serpent that exuded poison and malice, and as having a "poisonous heart." His honor threatened, but still intact, de Vargas made sure to order that the elder Juan Manuel, then in Mexico City, saw to paying Rael de Aguilar's expenses during his exile. The networks of credit and honor still mattered to don Diego even during his imprisonment in the farthest parts of the Spanish Empire.⁴⁷ After four years of legal conflict, relative helplessness, and the death of his beloved son, don Diego returned to New Mexico. Completely acquitted of the charges brought against him by the *audiencia* of Mexico City, with the *cabildo* and Rodriguez forced to pay for the costs of the lawsuit, de Vargas had a final triumph.⁴⁸

A little over a year after the final judgment in Mexico City, don Diego de Vargas died. The official narrative of his death, related to his son-in-law in Spain, was concerned with the principles that de Vargas spent his life attempting to emulate. Pursuing Apaches with "zeal and devotion to the royal service" during a storm, de Vargas fell ill and died within three days. Making out his will, he paternally recognized his *hijos naturales* "I further state that don Juan Manuel de Vargas, twenty-four years old, don Alonso de Vargas, age twenty-three, and their sister doña Maria Teresa, nineteen years old and with their mother in Mexico City, are my children, although not by legal marriage."⁴⁹

Conclusion

In October of 1706 Juan Manuel de Vargas Zapata, the American-born son of de Vargas, wrote a petition to Ignacio Lopez de Zarate. Diego de Vargas had been dead for two years, and in the month before he wrote the letter, Juan Manuel's mother had died. Now twenty-seven years old, Juan Manuel de Vargas wrote to his brother-in-law in a plaintive letter about his own grief at the passing of his mother and father. He recognized the familial legitimacy of Zarate, but also included his own half-sister, doña Isabel Maria de Vargas Pimentel as he begged for help in securing a position and a future for himself and his siblings in New Spain. Most importantly, Juan Manuel underlined the obligations of remote fraternity between himself, Zarate, and doña

⁴⁵ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 103-107 and 110-119.

⁴⁶ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 121-124.

⁴⁷ Kessell et al, *That Disturbances Cease*, 311-313.

⁴⁸ John L. Kessell et al, *A Settling of Accounts: The Journals of Don Diego de Vargas, New Mexico, 1700-1704* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002) 104-105.

⁴⁹ Kessell et al, *A Settling of Accounts*, 229.

Isabel.

Most interestingly, Juan Manuel appealed to the former authority of Diego de Vargas. His honorable father's trust in Lopez, Diego de Vargas's advice to rely upon Lopez for financial assistance, and de Vargas's currency of honor were all called upon by Juan Manuel to ask for aid. "I beg of you to have compassion for my need and that of my brother and sister. We find ourselves without a single real to get by with in this land" is how Juan Manuel described his situation. After his death, Diego de Vargas's heirs remained divided by their geographical locations. In New Spain Juan Manuel and his siblings all existed on the remnants of their father's reputation and honor.⁵⁰ In Spain, Isabel Maria asserted her own power.

The daughter that Diego de Vargas had addressed with childish simplicity through the years had grown into a woman of authority. In correspondence with the former parish priest of Torrelaguna, now serving in Peru, Isabel Maria wrote about the losses of her father, brother, and uncle that had occurred over the course of several short years and the toll it took on her in the form of grief. She closed her letter by notifying her former confessor that her father's final arrangements made her and her children the immediate successors to his estate. Using a final act of delegated paternal power, Isabel Maria secured a future for her children as a matriarch.

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⁵⁰ Kessell et al, *A Land So Remote*, Letter 64, 319 – 321.

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