

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Dr. Catherine Tracy Goode, director of the Tools for Researchers program at the Americas Research Network, to talk about the scandal of Casiana Melo. So before we get into the drama, can you give us a bit of context around who Casiana was?

TG: Casiana Melo is largely an unknown historical figure, but her life was recorded in more detail than most women in the Spanish colonies, because she was entangled with both the victim and main suspect of a political assassination in 1792. She was Spanish-born, what we call peninsular. She was wealthy, and she was one of the most elite members of society in 1790s Merida, which was the capital of the province of Yucatán, which was in the viceroyalty of New Spain. Before 1790, most of what we know about her comes from the genealogical record, although I actually have not been able to locate her birth or baptismal records.

But we know that in 1777, she's listed as the wife of Clemente Rodríguez de Trujillo, when he was granted permission to travel to Campeche as the new treasurer of this city. And that today was and still is a Mayan indigenous space. But even though I'm really focusing on Spaniards and this particular Spanish woman, but Yucatán really is an indigenous space above all things. She was probably a teenager when she came to the Americas. She was recently married with no children yet. So I'm guessing she was somewhere between 14 and 20 at the time, which would put her birth in the late 1750s or early 1760s.

Once she was in the Americas, she had at least nine children. So I've been able to document nine children. Their first children were born in Campeche, but in the 1780s, Clemente was promoted to treasurer of the province of Yucatán. And so at some point in the mid-1780s, they relocated from Campeche to Merida. And the genealogical record looks fairly normal for a young, wealthy wife who followed her husband to the colonies. But after the assassination of the intendant of Yucatán in June of 1792, the story of Casiana's life was revealed to be far more interesting than the genealogical documentation suggests.

AT: So now we're going to get into the adultery and murder.

TG: Yes. So this starts with the story of the assassination of Lucas de Gálvez. And this is really one of the most famous moments in Yucatán history and really in colonial Mexican history. My co-author Mark Lentz has written one of the best accounts of the events surrounding the murder in June of 1792. This is Mark Lentz, *Murder in Mérida, 1792: Violence, Factions and the Law*. He used the investigations into the murder, and this amounts to about 50 volumes plus sundry documentation in archives in Mexico and Spain, to reconstruct a picture of Yucatecan society in the late colonial period from the most elite people like Casiana to their servants and enslaved men and women who worked in their homes, from the Mayan-speaking villagers who worked in elite homes but also more selling their wares in markets, in the capital and other cities and towns in their province, as well as a whole host of characters that became part of the competing factions amongst the political elite.

Lucas was appointed as the new attendant in 1787. Essentially, he was the governor of the province but this was a new role in a series of reforms that were happening across colonial Latin America. And so in this period, this is known as the Bourbon reforms, the era of the Bourbon

reforms, when Spain is restructuring their colonies to bring them more firmly back under imperial control and to reroute profits back to the crown rather than allow them to circulate within the colonies. The Yucatán though, within the vice royalty of New Spain was an especially conservative region and it's conservative for the small cities. And they were still holding on to the old encomienda systems, and essentially these are land and resource grants made by the crown to individuals. And they were really rewards to the early conquistadors. So it was really a 16th century program of sorts. It went back further into medieval Spain on the peninsula, but the Yucatán was one of the few places to maintain the encomienda system into the late 18th century. And then they also where the church is essentially the most powerful system in the province and the bishop, Piña y Mazo, was essentially the de facto leader of the province and he's in power from 1780 to 1795.

So the intendant is brought in to carry out a series of reforms including abolishing the encomienda and taking power away from the church. And so he was deeply unpopular with Yucatán's leading families. Mark writes about the factions that developed and how these divisions played out in Merida. And in simple terms, this is much simpler than it was in reality but essentially you were either with the bishop or you were with the reformers.

AT: So he's not popular with the church, he's not popular with the elites. So who was on his side?

TG: Some of the elite families are on his side. So this is essentially, the Bourbon reforms are kind of the political and economic arm of the Spanish Enlightenment. So it's about bringing in reforms. There's a whole thing about free trade. So there are some of the families that are on his side and he does actually have political support in the city in Merida. But they're split. And then Casiana is a really interesting figure in this because in the letters that we have from her, she represents herself as being in the bishop's camp but it's pretty well-documented that she had adulterous affairs with both Lucas and the bishop's nephew, Toribio del Mazo, and this love triangle became the focus of the investigations into the assassination. Mark's book is excellent on this and so it's a really good reference to find out more about the details of how the factions fell out during this time of the assassination.

But on the evening of June 22nd, 1792, Lucas de Gálvez was traveling home from a party hosted by one of Merida's elite women with his driver Jose Antonio, an enslaved teenager of African descent and the treasurer of the province, Clemente Rodriguez de Trujillo.

AT: And that's Casiana's husband.

TG: Yes, yes, exactly. And basically a masked cowboy or vaquero stops his carriage in the street as they are heading home and hurls a spear at him. He's mortally wounded. They've taken him back to his house and he bleeds out very quickly. So he dies very quickly from these wounds. But for my purposes, it's this point where Casiana's love life becomes a matter of public scrutiny, from the documentation, from the investigations and also from the letters, we see this as well. And the investigations start shortly after the assassination in June of 1792, but they run for years after that, into the 1800s. But they make it clear that Casiana's affairs were public

knowledge. But that knowledge moved from the realm of gossip to witness testimony and that leads to the confiscation of her love letters. So from 1792 to 1795, investigators focused on non-elite members of society as suspects. And there were a couple of different investigators through these periods, but they were being pressured by the leading families and the bishop to not turn their gaze toward the wealthy members of society, but to try to pin it on somebody from the middling classes or lower.

AT: So I don't think I'd realize that her husband was in the car, so to speak, with her lover when he was murdered. But since we're talking about he was the treasurer, I'm assuming that was a fairly high level position. He was a member of this elite. So was he ever seriously considered as a suspect who may have been in cahoots with someone or was it more a political, don't look at him because he's important?

TG: Clemente is basically the second most important man in the province in terms of civil government. Interestingly, it makes Casiana probably the most powerful woman in the province because the intendant is unmarried and the bishop is unmarried. So Clemente is the highest level official with a wife, essentially, but they were good friends with Lucas. He was initially a suspect, but he was dismissed as a suspect pretty quickly. And then the lens never turned on him again. Given how public his wife was, Mark documents in the book that she would go out gambling and drinking and she was setting up rendezvous with these two lovers, at least the two, we know of in Merida, but also at locations outside of the city. She was a very well-known figure even before the assassination. And he was fairly quiet, I think. And there's no indication that he objected to her lifestyle. So I think that it was pretty clear pretty quickly that he was not involved in the murder.

And I should say just for clarification, I've made a decision, it's kind of a political decision on my part, to refer to men by their first names. We always refer to women by their first names, but we usually refer to men by their surnames. And when you have a cast of characters as big as we do in this case, it's easier to use first names than surnames, but sometimes it's jarring for people to hear me call him Lucas, because he's so well-known in Mexican history as Gálvez, but I think it's important that there be some parity there between our women historical subjects and our male historical subjects. It was so ingrained in me, I think, as a student of history and as a graduate student and that men went by their surnames. And I had to make myself say, Kahlo and Rivera or Frida and Diego, because one of the things I think these letters do is they help us to elevate the women in this, you know, it's a story about men. It's male assassins and a male victim and male politics, but these women really had an important role in it and I'm trying to bring them to the forefront.

AT: All right, so it doesn't seem like the husband did it, even though he was literally right there, which is just a great coincidence. So instead they turned their attention to the bishop's nephew that you mentioned, that she was also having an affair with.

TG: Yes, yes. So after the first round of investigations that were really focused on folks that were lower down the social hierarchy, there's a new investigator who comes in in 1795, and his name

was Francisco de Guillén, and he really turned the tables on the bishop's nephew, Toribio, and made him the prime suspect. Toribio was notorious in Merida. He was known for violence, both against servants and animals. There are stories of him riding horses to death, and he was well known for drinking and partying and gambling and for multiple love affairs with married women. But he basically, until 1795, acted with almost complete impunity under the auspices of his uncle, the bishop. The bishop protected his nephew.

And there's an interesting issue with this in that, with the Bourbon reforms and the reforms being made to the church, as the bishop had less and less power, he had less and less power to protect his nephew, essentially. The current project that Mark and I are working on starts here when the investigators confiscated 199 private letters from Toribio's room in the bishop's palace. And again, part of those reforms to the church, it wouldn't have been possible five years earlier for civil authorities to enter the bishop's palace. Because of the kind of legal changes that were happening, it was possible to go into his rooms and confiscate evidence. So Mark invited me to collaborate on this project with him, because I've been working on private letters and letter writing practices in the Spanish colonial world. So he brings an expertise on the Gálvez case and the context of Yucatán and I bring a knowledge of private letters as historical sources.

AT: So he actually had two different motives here. So first off, the intendant was reducing his uncle's power to protect him from the consequences of his own actions. And they were sleeping with the same married woman. So her letters provide not just proof of that additional motive, but also weren't they used to determine his movements and they used that to undermine his alibi?

TG: Yes, exactly. So there's 196 letters from these two women and 110 of them were written by Casiana. Most of the letters refer to his movements in some form or fashion. Now, the letters technically all predate the murder. So they were not able to use the letters to actually disprove his alibi. And his alibi was that he was in a rural indigenous town near the Presidio of Tihosuco, which is a fair distance from Merida. They interviewed people in that village. They interviewed people along the way. They interviewed people at the Presidio. And so it wasn't just the letters that were used because essentially the letters were used to prove a pattern of movement as opposed to where he actually was on the night of the murder.

And I'm gonna back up just a second here because of this love triangle. So you're absolutely right. There are multiple possible motives for Toribio. But the one that the investigators really focused on was the love triangle between Lucas, Toribio and Casiana. Now, Lucas, because he was the intendant, was essentially in charge of the military in Yucatán. And Toribio was a militia lieutenant. That was his job. And as they were competing over Casiana, Lucas kept sending Toribio further and further away from Merida. Some of this is speculation because it's not that Lucas ever wrote down, "I am sending him away because he's my rival." But the investigators believed that. And it's a logical leap, I think, to make. So he was sent to Tihosuco and then even further away to one of the worst posts in probably all of New Spain is the city of Bacalar, where there was a town, a presidio at the time, which is on the coast and is probably several days ride back to Merida on horseback. So he was basically being exiled by his love rival for Casiana. A lot of this is documented in the letters. So the investigators read all of the letters and Guillén actually signs his initials on most of them as proof that he has read them. And they underlined

information about Toribio's movements. And the women really surveilled him. They surveilled him quite closely. They were aware of when he was in town, particularly when he was in town and was not in contact with them. They were constantly watching his carriage to see where it was parked, whose house it was parked at, as well as they kept abreast of the news about military movements. And so the letters couldn't be used to disprove the alibi directly. They were used to establish a pattern of movement.

They were also used to prove that he was untrustworthy, that he was lying, that he had multiple motives. But it's striking, I think, the way that the investigators, the mark the investigators left on the physical documents, showing their interest in his movements. And I did wanna just add one of the reasons that the letters are also particularly important is that letters are one of the main kinds of evidence that you can submit in under Spanish law, either in civil or criminal cases, but also in administrative processes. So we find most of the private letters in Spanish colonial collections, either in a criminal case. There's a lot, you'll find them in inquisition cases, but they also are part of the calling letters, which is when people were requesting passage to the colonies, they would submit a letter from a relative in the colonies, and as proof that they had someone waiting for them if they were given permission to go. But I also really think that the way that the investigators used this particular set of letters is interesting because it speaks to the fact that they trusted the word of women, that these women were, even two adulterous women, but they were seen as valuable sources of information within the investigation.

AT: Well, to be fair, they did have a self-serving motive to take the women at their word, because it supported their case. But I do think there's also the fact that this does play into a certain type of narrative about women. We're talking about women in the context of a jealous lover. So we're trusting that you're being honest in the context that we believe that you're emotional and a jealous woman, whereas if they were saying something that didn't serve that person's purpose or if they were in the realm of science or something, I'm not sure they would have believed them quite so readily.

TG: Right. That's a very good point. It's a very good point, and it's one of the contradictions in working with these letters and that I'm working through, I think, is that we just don't have very many descriptions of a woman's experience in their own words. That's relatively unusual, and particularly for it to be married women involved in adulterous relationships. There are contradictions there because these were private letters that were not intended to be read by anyone else. And in fact, they asked him repeatedly to burn the letters or to destroy the letters, and they destroyed most of the letters they received from him. There's an interesting case in Mark's book where one of the enslaved servants that works for Casiana, his name was Toby, he kept two letters that he was told to put in the fire, and he kept them and saved them and did turn them in to investigators. Now, this is all pre-murder, but he kept them, because one of the big arguments that Mark makes is that it's the people who work in these elite houses that become major sources of information and witnesses in these cases because they see and hear everything. But for me, the letters are this chance to see what the women were saying in a place where they didn't expect anyone else to read it. And I think there's a level of honesty there because of who they're communicating with and why. But then again, there's a whole issue

about how they represent themselves in the letters as well. So there's a lot of contingencies in trying to figure out the puzzle, I think.

AT: So there was another woman who was writing letters to him, obviously, because there's several dozen more letters. And initially, you thought that they were from, I think six or seven women, but it turned out that they were just using aliases?

TG: Yes. So I'm focusing on the letters from Casiana today because we know more about her from the genealogical records but also from the records of the investigation. And she did write the majority of the letters. It's about 109 of the 196. There were three that were letters from men of the 199. But the other woman was called María Ignacia Caveró. And she was the wife of a prominent encomendero, Manuel Buendía, in Mérida. And together, they actually served as trusted friends of Toribio. And they kind of looked after his home in town when he was out of town. She often talked about sending him things that, "the new pillow is coming on the coach that's arriving in town." Or at one point, she sends him combs. And I think there's some medication she sends. She makes sure that his laundry is taken care of. There's some interesting letters where she says, "I received your letter in the dirty clothes that you sent to me to wash." That's not a direct quote, but something - oh, I know. It's so skeezy. And then she would pass, because of course she has to keep the secret from her husband. And so she would pass letters to him and the clean clothes that she would send back to him.

But you're right, María Ignacia created a bit of a hornet's nest for me as an historian. Because as I was transcribing the letters, I found seven unique signatures plus Casiana's, as well as 77 unsigned letters. And it's not because these are illicit letters, about a love affair, but they're also, I think of these kind of as Jane Austen letters. These are daily letters that people sent across town, as opposed to a letter that was put in the post that would go, so their servants and their enslaved servants would carry these letters from one house to the other in town. And so they're fairly informal. They don't follow a lot of the conventions that you would find in letter writing manuals, because they received those kind of deliveries all day long, basically.

But as I was trying to figure out who the 77 unsigned letters were from, because I knew some of them were from Casiana from handwriting and context. And again, we had eight individual women, eight women having an affair with this one man, what a coup. But as I was going through the unsigned letters, I didn't really want to compare the handwriting, because I feel like that's a special skill. It's not one that I have any training in. But it very quickly became clear that the seven aliases, that these other seven women, one of whom was María Ignacia Caveró, that it was all in her handwriting. And partly that's because she has a very distinctive G when she writes. And it just became abundantly clear that this was all written by one woman. We had to sort of shift our focus from letters by eight women to how these two women are representing themselves so differently. Casiana is much more, she's more aggressive in her letters, and much more upfront. And María Ignacia is more circumspect, more careful, using these aliases. There's even one letter where María Ignacia breaks up with him, breaks up with Toribio, because she's worried that her husband will find out and she'll lose her family.

AT: The tone difference does make sense from everything you've told us so far because we've

established Clemente was fine with this. He wasn't gonna do anything, whereas, you know, María's got a husband that, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised if this was one of those times and places where a man could just beat his wife legally with no consequences. And so, you know, plenty of women today obviously still have plenty to fear from a husband. But in that time period, especially if he was a member of the property-owning elite, yeah, that completely makes sense to me that she would be a lot more careful that she wouldn't be signing these, that she would be using aliases. And I'm guessing that as far as we know María, unlike Casiana, because we know Casiana was having an affair with at least one other dude.

TG: Exactly.

AT: And people knew about it at least discreetly.

TG: Yes.

AT: So she wasn't out here, I assume, being like, "oh yes, send me your dirty laundry to have taken care of."

TG: Yeah, no, exactly. So María is definitely, she is one of the elite in town, but she's not nearly as elite nor as powerful as Casiana, for sure. And it's interesting that there's a subservience in her tone to Toribio that is not there for Casiana. Even though there are times when Casiana, I don't wanna say begging, but in a way she's begging for his attention. But it's very much as a lover, not as someone who's subservient to him. So, these are all still things that I'm working out. It's interesting how you read through these documents and you transcribe them and then you start translating them and then you reread something and your perspective changes as you are working on the analysis in them. But that's something I think that has stayed with me through most of it is that Casiana is a presence that's very different from María Ignacia in the way she presents herself in the letters.

AT: Now, documentation comes up a lot in these stories in terms of what gets written down in the first place, what gets saved versus what gets destroyed. And it is fascinating how many points in this story, these letters shouldn't have survived, from the fact that Toribio should have destroyed them in the first place. We've got the letters from him that the servant was supposed to destroy and didn't, which given that he was an enslaved person was probably quite dangerous for him. And even then the fact that these were not thrown out at some point, but rather were saved by virtue of this unconnected trial that was of enough historical significance that they got saved. It just seems incredibly unlikely that these letters would have survived to be found by you.

TG: It is. And we're still lacking so much information about Casiana. From the letters, I think it's clear that these two are not the only women he's involved with, because they do complain about his unfaithfulness in the letters. And I think there are times that they're complaining about one another, but I'm pretty sure there are times that they're complaining about at least a third, if not a

fourth woman, but we don't have letters from those women. But one of the things about letters that's I think fascinating is that, so for an elite woman like Casiana, in her lifetime, she dies in 1812, but that's 62 years, which is old for the late 18th, early 19th century. Even if she was 52 when she died, that's after at least nine pregnancies, that's survival. But in that lifetime, even if it was only 52 years and so that's 30 years as an adult, she would have written over 40,000 letters. And that's a conservative estimate, two to three letters a day. And she would have been writing back to Spain, to family in Spain. She would have been writing to other people in Merida. She might have been sending letters to other people in other parts of the viceroyalty. And so, even though we have these extraordinary letters, which, because they're written by women, because there's a long run of letters written by one woman and these happen to be love letters and love letters in an adulterous relationship. But they're still such a small picture of just her life as a letter writer, let alone everything else.

And so there's interesting issues, I think, about how the absence in the archive is as important as what we find in the archive. And scholars have written about this in much more complicated context. Zeb Tortorici, who's a scholar who's at NYU here in the United States, has written about this in relationship to LGBTQ issues in the colonial past and that it's not just that the documentation wasn't created. Sometimes the documentation is removed. Sometimes the documentation is hidden. One of the things he talks about in his book, archivists will mislabel documents because they don't want people to know there's a document about gay activities in their archive. And so there's all sorts of ways that documentation gets hidden and lost and were never archived in the first place.

AT: I could see at least two reasons for an archivist to do that, first being if they are just someone who is bigoted and wants to hide that piece of history. But I could also see it being a protection for those documents and for the archive itself because I mean, I was just reading that a book ended up on a potentially ban-worthy list of children's picture books because the author's last name was Gay. And so it was tagged as potentially sexually explicit because some idiot saw the word "gay" and didn't stop to realize that it was just the author's last name. So I mean, if you are wanting to protect and preserve that documentation, it might be safer to, depending on the year that and the place,

TG: Absolutely. And there are also, I think, perfectly mundane reasons why documents are sort of lost in the archive. They're in the archive. So for example, this volume of letters is available at the National Archive in Mexico, but it is not cataloged as letters. It's not cataloged as anything to do with Casiana Melo or María Ignacia Caveró. I can't remember what the title of it is, but it's something about the assassination of Gálvez. How would you find this set of letters if you wanted to do something on the history of women? And we go through the guide and look and sometimes it's just dumb luck. And I'm not sure that the person who made the guide was purposefully trying to hide these letters from women. They probably just didn't think they were of any value. And so there are, when we're thinking about historical methodology, how to read the guides against the grain. One of your other guests brought up the idea of reading against the grain. But sometimes you actually have to read the guide against the grain in order to find the documents to be able to read them against the grain. Even in a case like that where it might



have just been negligence, but it's not without power. The power to exclude, the power to elide, the power to hide people's stories is important. And I think it's not that these stories are not in the archives, some of them aren't, but there's a lot more of these stories in the archive than we realize, even if it's just fragments of their stories, but they're not easily accessible in a lot of cases for a variety of different reasons.

AT: And you mentioned one reason potentially being that, archivists just didn't think this was important. And that's another issue that comes up a lot where I've had biographers tell me about a box of letters that almost just got chucked in the bin. And then literally the person was like, "oh, no, I should maybe give these to like the historical society or something."

TG: Yeah.

AT: But, you know, all of the letters that didn't get rescued from the bins.

TG: Right. No, exactly. And, really up through probably up through the mid-20th century, but I can speak to the early modern period, that letter writing is your best technology of communication. Except for face-to-face communication. It may be your only mode of communication. And I do think about that because I work on another set of letters, different place earlier in the 18th century. But I just think about all the letters in the collection that were not archived. And again, most of the letters we have for the Spanish colonial period, with some exceptions for some very high-level merchants and some of the aristocracy in Spain proper, we just don't have big runs of letters from people. And unless they were preserved in a criminal or civil case or in some kind of administrative process. And this is a criminal case. The other case I have is a civil case. And there's lots of individual letters. We find lots of, one letter from one person here or one letter from another person there. But to have long runs of letters is less common.

AT: Now, to get back to what we do have documentation for because I just realized we never actually mentioned what happened with Toribio and his trial.

TG: Yes.

AT: We just sort of got distracted.

TG: Yes. He is imprisoned in 1795. And he stays in prison until 1803 where he is finally exonerated. But he's not exonerated until someone else basically confesses. And I'm gonna leave this to the book because it's the spoiler for the book. But essentially he is seen as the murderer for eight years and languishes in prison for eight years. And then a new set of suspects come in but they essentially confess, more than five years after he's been imprisoned. And it still takes more time after they confess for him to be fully exonerated. But we don't actually know much about him after he's released from prison. And we don't really know much about Casiana.

AT: So I have to admit, when I first read through the story, I felt bad for him that he was locked up for so many years but now knowing that he was basically this like rich, privileged jerk who was like abusive towards people and animals, because I'm an animal lover and I would have locked him up for that. But yeah, I almost feel like that's deserved even though it wasn't for the correct crime. Cause like you said, his uncle was protecting him for years.

TG: Yeah. No, and it's his uncle fell out of favor and power in 1795 and that's when they're finally able to hold Toribio responsible. So it is interesting because he's not a good dude. You know, he's not, but he's not held responsible for his own crimes. He's held responsible for somebody else's crime. So that's a complication, I think. There's no indication that he ever has any communication with these women again. Now they may well have, but there's no record of it anyway. We don't have any additional letters. There's some contradictions in whether he actually goes to Oaxaca or not, but I don't think he's, he's no longer in Yucatán anymore. I mean, this is the thing with colonial documentation is that there's always another archive and another copy of a this or a that and things can get a little muddled, but we know he's released in 1803 that he is compensated by the crown for his eight years in prison. And yeah, again, not a good dude. Even if you just think about the way he's treating these women, now they're complicit in being in a relationship with him, but it's clear that he has more power and privilege in that relationship with each woman than they do in terms of wanting him to be faithful, although they're not being faithful. It's a complicated question.

AT: It's also interesting that you bring up the tone and power dynamics of these relationships because in some of your writing, you've brought up an interesting connection between this story and the perspectives that it presents that we don't necessarily have a lot of examples of women's voices at that time. And you tie it in with the concept of honor, specifically Casiana's honor.

TG: Yes, well, and that's because Casiana does that. And it's probably to me the most fascinating thing that comes out of the letters, but also the thing I understand the least that's come out of the letters. And partly because the concept of honor is a big topic, for good and bad, in colonial Latin American history, but it almost always focuses on men's honor and women essentially exist as vessels to house men's honor and that male honor is often judged on their ability to control the women in their lives. And so I think it's very interesting that Casiana invokes her own honor. And she does it in two different letters. And the first is she wants to be viewed with honor and there's apparently some conflict between her and Toribio and she's asked him to see her with honor. And it can be hard, one of the things about using letters as historical documents is that there's a lot of information assumed on the part of the writer that the writer just assumes that the recipient already has all of the context and knows all of the names. And so a lot is left unwritten in letters. So it's not clear what happened or what she may have done or what he may have done, but she asked him for that. And she says later in the same letter that she wants him to represent her in public as having honor. And again, she's not talking about the honor of her husband or of her family, but about her honor and that her as an honorable woman would have repercussions for her husband and her family, but it's still interesting the way she

words that, I think, that it's about her and not family honor or not her husband's honor. And from that discussion, it's pretty clear that their affair is public knowledge. And of course, this is before the murder. Although the two letters that she talks about her own honor are undated, but she is asking Toribio to protect her reputation in public.

And then in the second letter, she has received word that Toribio is gossiping about her. And word has gotten back to her that he's gossiping about her. And she says, "my honor demands of me that you take this seriously and whatever I have done to upset you, was not done out of malice." She's probably talking about her relationship either with her husband or maybe with Lucas or there's a whole, you know, there's a whole kind of thing in that he's kind of publicly rebuking her and she's asking him not to do that and that to remember her honor.

And, you know, it's interesting because it's partly about her public reputation but it's also about how her concern for how Toribio sees her. And so there's a private aspect to this invocation of honor as well. And to be honest, I'm still grappling with how to make sense of this because I've not really found great secondary sources to help me understand the idea of women's honor as something integral to themselves, not to a family unit, not to their husbands, not to their fathers. But I think too, Casiana's life is really interesting in this respect because, at the time, she's the most prominent woman in Merida but she's having affairs with two different men and corresponding regularly with one of them. And it's fairly clear that it's public knowledge that this is happening. Her affairs are the stuff of gossip but she continues to be la tesorera, the wife of the treasurer. But, you know, she also remained married through all of this. She had and continued having children.

And one of the things that, you know, as an historian, I can't document this but there were three children born during the time of her affair with Toribio, at least three. And all but one of her children have the same godfather in the baptismal records except for Carlos Antonio who was baptized in March of 1791 with Toribio as the godfather. And again, I can't prove that that's his child. There's no documentation to say that but it's interesting that there's one case where he is the godfather and the padrino, the godfather, is a very important role in Spanish colonial society but also in early modern Catholicism. And yet there really are very few consequences to this scandal for Casiana. And there are some but she and Clemente continue to live in Merida. They have two more children after the murder. And before his death in 1805 and hers in 1812, two of her older sons went on to be prominent members of Yucatán society and politics in the years leading up to independence.

So it's interesting, I think, because she is invoking this idea of honor and that her adultery was largely ignored by her husband and seemed to have been largely tolerated by society and that in the end, her honor was left intact. Casiana basically gets away with all of this, as a woman. And that goes against the norm and it goes against our expectations of what Spanish colonial society in the late 18th century would have expected from an upstanding woman of society.

AT: Well, something that I've noticed throughout different conversations is this intersection of being privileged in some ways but marginalized in other ways. So obviously the fact that she was a woman was a degree of marginalization but other than that, she was wealthy. She was Spanish rather than being an indigenous person. Her husband had high social standing and therefore so did she, but also she had the privilege of a supportive husband. And you have to

wonder how many privileges did it take to offset being a woman?

TG: Yeah, no, I think that's a really important point and it's one of the things that I'm trying to, that I'm grappling with in this case is how exceptional is it? And to link back to what we were talking about before, there's a lack of documentation even for very wealthy elite women in the archives for the Spanish colonial period. And so, it's hard to say whether this case is one of a kind or are we just lacking the documentation to understand the role that adultery played in society as a whole. And there is more work coming out about these things, but you're also absolutely right that I think adultery was probably more common than we would imagine, but not everybody got away with it. Not every woman's husband was tolerant of it. Not every woman was in a place where she could maintain her position in society, whether that was the top of the social hierarchy or in the middle or at the bottom. And so that there's definitely aspects of Casiana's experience of this that I think are probably unique. It's speculation. And part of this is based on new research that I think is coming out, When I say new, I'm an historian, so new is in the last 30 years. But, and because it's on topics that are just, it's that thing where you're researching something else and you happen to find this volume about a woman who, I mentioned in one of the papers I sent you, the Nicole von Germeten book and there's a couple of cases in that book and of women who did get away with adultery and others that didn't. The consequences of that could often be violent. They can have real financial consequences for women, that that idea that, marriage is not really about love or a partnership, it's about financial stability in a society where, especially as an elite woman, you don't really have another way to make money. Women further down on the social hierarchy are working, but an elite woman doesn't have another, and I don't mean to suggest that that, poor little rich girl, but it's interesting to think about the contingencies for women in different places and within the social hierarchy and the racial hierarchy or ethnic hierarchy and what that means for their survival. And it's not about there being more freedom, it's not about freedom, but it is about how you can negotiate your circumstances and that your circumstances at the very top are different than your circumstances at the very bottom of that in then in the middle. And within the confines of your circumstances, how are you able to negotiate your daily life essentially.

AT: I'm just going back to all of the ways that we never would have known about this. So if he had actually destroyed the letters like he was supposed to, if there hadn't been a murder, if he hadn't been suspected, if those letters hadn't been confiscated because of all that, like, there are so many ways that these could have just been lost to history and particularly because, you were saying, María Ignacia, we still don't know much about. And so when we're talking about records and documentation of adultery, we wouldn't have had any of that.

TG: No, no. And the main way that adultery is documented in the colonial period is either through violence because whatever man didn't like the adultery, father or brother or husband, could react violently, or through divorce, and which is not super common but was possible. And so again, what that means is that the only way we have a way to view a history of adultery is through crime. And that taints the way that we see it, which is what's interesting about these letters because these letters, even though they're collected as part of a criminal investigation,

but they're not actually part of the criminal investigation. They're produced completely separate separately from that, which is really unique.

So there's a book by Sonya Lipsett-Rivera called *Macho*, where she looks at the concept of machismo in colonial Mexico. There's the Nicole von Germeten book. There's a much earlier book, and I'm going to never remember the name of it, but on colonial Peru. And they look at adultery in cases of divorce and some of the violence that comes out of that, but all of the documentation comes out of criminal cases. And criminal cases are going to skew you towards violence. And I'm not saying that their analyses are wrong or incorrect, but the kind of documentation we use is going to send us in a particular direction. And one of the few ways we can get at some of these stories is through the criminal record, but it does leave us in a place where women are much more victimized than I feel like these letters. These women sort of paint themselves as victims of his faithlessness, but he's not violent toward them. Even though he has a reputation for violence, there's no evidence that he was ever violent towards the women he was involved with. But again, history is all about these contingencies, about what you can get access to and what kind of documentation it was and what story emerges from that documentation.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.