

Picture a woman tending to fields and herds in the Andean region. Picture her giving offerings to the goddess, Pachamama. See those chosen working as midwives, holding ‘communion’ with and for the moon from whom she descended, marrying and transforming into Coya. Now envision an invasion, a conquest, a transformation and a resistance. Irene Silverblatt asks one to re-envision this history when reading her book *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru*. This book devotes itself to re-envisioning the life of the Inca woman and the subsequent conquest by the Spanish Empire. Though eleven chapters long, the author essentially organizes the book in four parts - pre-conquest Inca, transformation, Post-conquest Peru, and a proposal for further study. Through the reconstruction of daily life for the Inca in these three stages of Peruvian history, Silverblatt analyzes the complex interplay of political hierarchy and gender (xix). Through this analysis she gives accounts as to how the empire-building of the Inca transformed gender ideologies (xix) and the subsequent transformation of these ideologies by Spanish institutions. These ideas, thus centered on gender and political hierarchy, imply and shape the “problem of power and its institution into cultural forms”(xix).

Silverblatt claims that within Inca society the female while not equal to the men have power due to the societal hierarchy that Inca beliefs generated. Establishing the lines of descent from the main God and Goddess of the Inca, one can see how the ranking of the people evolved from whom one was descendent. The Sun god and all other distinctly male gods allowed the men to be ranked as they themselves were while the Moon goddess and all other distinctly female gods ranked the females in another system. This permitted cults of femininity to spread throughout the empire establishing a female power base. It also intertwined the divine hierarchy with the political one. Therefore, due to these separate but parallel systems the author

sets forth the idea that through parallelism the Inca men granted women equality. “In the eyes of Andean women and men their complementary activities were essential to the reproduction of Andean life”(10). This idea, demonstrated by the amount of conquest that the Inca participated in, results with males off at war, attaining political office and favor. The females meanwhile stayed behind to keep everything running and the gods happy. Demonstrating that everyone had to do their part to keep the Inca world running.

Moreover Silverblatt introduces the idea of transformation of women, especially chosen women, through their usefulness to their fathers or male guardians as symbols of power and conquest. Always viewed as honorable, they evolved, through marriage, by body or sacrifice, into a wife of Sapa Inca, a priestess, or even a goddess in her own right. However, marriage converts into a metaphor for conquest, due to the fact that Sapa Inca had claim to all the empires' women. The account then changes tone with the arrival of the Spanish. Who brought with them their own ideologies and hierarchies. They challenged the parallelism that made the society work. Once again through transformative conquest the role of the woman changed. No longer could they have the social power they once enjoyed but new avenues opened up.

Devalued by the Spanish, they were never granted autonomy over themselves as the Spanish system classified them as minors unable to take care of themselves. The women needed permission from a male guardian to hold land. And at the level of the elite, this meant that women entered the marketplace through land holdings, but quite often had to fight to keep them. Silverblatt clearly demonstrates that land in the Andes is the most prized economic possession; the more land owned, the more power wielded. Nonetheless, even if they no longer wielded social power over others women developed into powerhouses by becoming keepers of knowledge and teaching the Inca culture to those wanting to learn. Furthermore, if the women of

the elite kept 'some' land, the women of the peasantry had their land forcefully removed. Any subsequent attempts to acquire it back resulted in loss in the form of economic burdens and sexual assault.

Nonwithstanding, the women at every level fought back, in pure social warfare. They evolved into masters of the system and in some of the examples that Silverblatt utilizes beat the Spanish at their own game. This warfare often involved keeping past traditions, religious and political, alive. Moreover the conquistadors' arrival created a new identity for the women to assume, the Witch. The Spanish's own preconceived notions allowed for this to happen. Accusations of witchcraft and treatment of condemned witchcraft represented attempts of keeping their culture alive.

The proposal the author produces comments on the further studying and reconstruction of this history. Silverblatt speaks of how historians should embrace voices that do not speak as much in the mainstream historical though. I believe that in the thirty plus years since the publishing of *Moon, Sun and Witches* the process is well underway and making strides. By that same token, the author's ability to bring these voices to the center and explore how they participated in daily life and then resistance is remarkable. The exploration of gender that the author embarks on starts out quite solid for the first sections of the book but towards the end that the story begins to fall apart. To add to these criticisms there is a disregard for the male forms of resistance. In fact the tone is quite against men. The author plainly argues that the men abandoned their villages while the women fled to Punas. She excuses this away as a form of resistance. In addition when the word witches is in the title one expects more on witches but it seems that the evidence turned out too fragmented or Eurocentric to do more than speculate. Though the writing believable, the certainty from earlier within the book does not remain.

This transformative work existed in an ambitious sphere well ahead of its time. The combination of many areas of expertise allowed for it to make breakthroughs in the fields of anthropology, ethnohistory, Latin American studies, and women's studies. It skillfully sheds light on voices not heard however these are still not heard in the ways Silverblatt strives for. The sources quoted most within the book are all unfortunately Spanish or Andean male. Even though some of the chronicles from the Andean men come before the conquest and further the understanding of what life was like for the Andean and Inca people, the female voice is still missing. The lack of that voice then makes it hard to take value in Silverblatt's statements on women, their roles, practices and beliefs.

Overall *Moon, Sun and Witches*, is a readable if a bit boring book. The author through trying to accomplish so much, turned out a dry piece of work. The chronological organization and structure of the book make perfect sense, even if certain sections, specifically the gods and the inquisition, ran long. Even so, this book offers an unique way of looking at the role of gender within pre and post-conquest Inca and Andean society. The history told within is now a norm to study. Thus some of the problems could be attributed to the fact that this book is one of the first of its kind. The author's purpose evolves into a valuable beginning on the conversation of how gender affects politics, the hierarchy of class and ultimately how power exists in a cultural context. If taken further I would recommend the use of more evidence on the Puna, the men's forms of resistance and finding more sources with women's voices, so that they might be truly heard instead of speculated in the envisioning process. What is more, despite the criticisms of the text, I would recommend it to one who has had no contact with these ideas before. It is a good piece of writing and introduction to the lives of Andean women.

