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Review:

Alejandra Dubcovsky, *Talking Back: Native Women and the Making of the Early South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

AUBREY LAUERSDORF, PhD

In 1670, a Timucua Indian named Benito insisted that the governor of Spanish Florida help him take control of the chieftainship of Santa Elena de Machava, which was currently held by an usurper. This political conflict was between two men, but women were still central to it. Benito could only make this claim because he was the son of the now-deceased María Magdalena, whose matriline had the right to lead Machava. The effort by this Timucua son to restore his mother's lineage to leadership is one of many stories in Alejandra Dubcovsky's *Talking Back: Native Women and the Making of the Early South* that show Native women "had everything to do with politics and power in colonial Florida" (16). Dubcovsky expertly navigates a Spanish colonial archive that filters Native women's voices through translation, summary, and manipulation – or excludes them altogether – to reveal women's continued importance to both their own societies and the imperial conflict transforming the South at the turn of the eighteenth century.

Telling Native women's stories is no easy feat: María Magdalena's name is only known to scholars from one line of text in a Spaniard's summary of some (now lost) letters written by her son (chapter 2). Thus, Dubcovsky must "rely on the available colonial documents but refuse to let them dictate the terms of historical engagement" (18) as she reconstructs the lives and experiences of women obscured or silenced in the Spanish archive. Among these is a murdered Chacato woman whose life was recorded only after it ended violently. In chapter 1, Dubcovsky offers possible answers to the questions that did not interest the Spanish men who investigated this unnamed woman's murder in 1695: How had her life intersected with the slave raiding that terrorized Chacato settlements in recent years? Why was she traveling alone in someone else's territory? And, most importantly, who was she to her family and community? In the process, Dubcovsky reframes this woman not as a passive victim of colonial violence, but as someone who "fled her captors and thus shifted the narrative of her enslavement" before her death (29).

Centering Native women like María Magdalena and the murdered Chacato woman also helps Dubcovsky challenge narratives about the colonial past that have been bolstered by the archival silence of women. She shows that Native voices can disrupt the stories Spaniards told about themselves, including an elite Criolla woman named Doña Juana de Florencia who petitioned the Spanish Crown in 1709 for restitution for her family's losses during Queen Anne's War (chapter 6). Doña Juana's petitions offered a "curated story of Spanish courage, wealth, and influence," (171) but Dubcovsky brings together archival fragments that allow the Apalachee people who lived alongside the Florencia family to 'talk back' to the elite woman's claims. Their complaints about the Florencias complicate Doña Juana's narrative, revealing "a pattern of abuse, neglect, and personal violence" perpetrated by both her and her male relatives against their Apalachee neighbors (178).

Yet Native women's voices can do more than cast a shadow on an elite Criolla woman's laudatory self-description. Dubcovsky argues that centering Native women reveals the persistence of Indigenous institutions across Florida and thus the limits of Spanish colonial control. To the dismay of Spaniards, Native people could and did insist on "a Native world that held Native women – as well as their knowledge, labor, and power – in great esteem" (4). Thus, when Benito made his matrilineal claim to the chieftainship of Machava, both Timucuas and Spaniards took him seriously, and he was ultimately successful. Dubcovsky's focus on women also helps her craft a satisfying narrative of Queen Anne's War (1702-1713), an imperial conflict that reshaped the colonial South but is rarely given serious consideration by scholars. The war exacerbated slave raiding in communities across Florida, which put Native women at the heart of the conflict – and not only as victims. When a 1702 English siege of St. Augustine forced the city's entire population

into the fort, Native, African, Spanish, and Criolla women alike suddenly found themselves in close proximity to the places where military decisions were made (chapter 4).

While Native women are the protagonists of *Talking Back*, these Spanish, Criolla, and African women also appear outside the fort: They are ever-present in the stories Dubcovsky reconstructs from archival fragments. In some cases, Dubcovsky emphasizes commonalities in these women's experiences. Native women especially "found their struggles enmeshed with those of Black women" (75) working to build family and social networks in a colonial context (chapter 3). Yet Dubcovsky is also mindful of the ways Spanish society was not just gendered but raced and classed. Spanish and Criolla women like Juana de Florencia had legal and economic privileges that were denied to Native and African women, and Dubcovsky shows how the former were uniquely able to use their access to imperial institutions to regain lost property after the war (chapter 5). Native and African women, in contrast, faced the real possibility of enslavement in the English colonies if they were captured during the conflict.

To tell the stories of Native women in the early colonial South, Dubcovsky uses not only Spanish archives but also archaeology, Indigenous myths and stories, and – perhaps most significantly – Timucua language materials. She insists that scholars "must stop ignoring sources written in non-European languages," (5) and she is currently undertaking a project to reconstruct Timucua from extant documents in collaboration with linguist Aaron Broadwell. These Timucua language sources enrich Dubcovsky's analysis, and *Talking Back* serves as a model for how historians might integrate Indigenous languages without living speakers into their scholarship. As Dubcovsky shows, language offers a window into Timucua people's views of their world and women's place within it, which Spaniards could not obscure or silence as they did in the colonial archive. Certainly, when María Magdalena regaled a young Benito with tales of their ancestors who led the town of Machava through food shortages, wars, ceremonies, and peace talks, she told him these stories not in Spanish, but in Timucua.

Aubrey Lauersdorf
Auburn University
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