



Distributive Struggle and the Self in the Early Modern Iberian World

Nikolaus Böttcher, Stefan Rinke, Nino Vallen (eds.)

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Johann Sadeler, *La recompensa de la justicia*, late sixteenth century, engraving.
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AGATA BLOCH

Portraying Womanhood in the Portuguese Atlantic*

INTRODUCTION

In 1805, a treatise was published in Porto, entitled *Apologia das mulheres*. Written by the French poet and literary critic Antoine Léonard Thomas (1732–1785), the text was about gender inequalities, women's subordination to men and the authorities, and conflict between the image of women created by society and the reality they faced. Thomas argued that women around the world were deprived of the possibility of social promotion and vertical mobility. The problem here was not only limitations resulting from the patriarchal system but also existing legal system themselves, which prevented them from participating in many social processes. Unfortunately, his criticism of gender equality did not simultaneously imply that he assumed equality between men and women. Even the words Thomas employed were quite contradictory because, on the one hand, he criticized the system that oppressed women while, on the other hand, he himself did not see them as full members of society, "since they do not work, nor ever fight for the Fatherland, they do not have any flattering memories, that would bind them to the Fatherland or by the vanity of works, or by virtues."¹

However, contrary to what Thomas and his Portuguese translator wanted to make his readers believe, Portuguese women at the time did play an active role in the legal spaces connecting Portugal's global empire. As a key case in point, this chapter shows how women residing overseas wrote the Portuguese king, petitioning him for grace. The legal possibility of sending such petitions was given to all

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¹ Antoine Léonard Thomas: *Apologia das mulheres ou Discurso em que se mostra com exemplos extrahidos da Historia, tanto antiga como moderna, que ellas são suscepiveis de virtudes Religiosas, Políticas, Guereiras, Literarias e Sociais no grão mais eminente, e que, conformando-se ao espirito predominante dos séculos consequirão, não poucas vezes, a gloria de dominarem nelles, dedicada a Senhora D. Catherina Micaella de Sousa Cezar e Lancastre*. Officina de Antônio Alvarez Ribeiro. Porto 1805, p. 158.

social groups of the Portuguese empire, even the most marginalized. Such a possibility allowed subaltern groups, among them single and married women as well as widows, to negotiate their own destinies and the functioning of the political system on a much larger scale than has conventionally been assumed. Petitions present a revealing source of information on perceptions of the world, as seen by subaltern women. Although they are generally only considered official correspondence, these documents can also be seen as the fruit of dialogue and, perhaps, negotiation between what women wanted to convey and what the system allowed them to do.

Before going deeper into the analysis of these petitions, I need to contextualize how the social imagination regarding women changed, both in the eyes of early modern society and from the perspective of contemporary historians. During the early modern period, women did not often appear as authors of books or poetry and their personal thoughts remained a mystery.² It was not until the nineteenth century that the first female writing on the socio-political and cultural issues of the Portuguese empire began to be published.³ These writings could be found in collections of letters, as in the case of *Correspondência Luso-Brasileira* (1807–1823), among which some letters were written by Maria Barbara Garcez, who had settled in Brazil; or letters from Inácia Carolina, who corresponded with her

² The first Portuguese-speaking female authors were Sórora Maria do Céu (1658–1753), considered to be one of the greatest poets and playwrights of her time; Paula da Graça, who in 1715 published the first book on a European and perhaps even on a global scale about feminist claims; and Teresa Margarida da Silva e Orta (1711–1792), who wrote the first romance written by a woman in the Portuguese language: *Máximas de virtude e formosura*. With respect to Paula da Graça, it should be mentioned that she was a woman of high nobility and a court assistant, maybe a daughter of Diogo Mendonça Corte-Real, a diplomat, politician, ambassador, and secretary of D. João V or a daughter of a chambermaid of Dona Maria Ana de Austria. Under these conditions, living in the Portuguese court, she published *Bondade das Mulheres vendicada, e Malícia dos Homens manifesta* in 1715, considered nowadays to be a first feminist “revolutionary shout,” in which she pointed to the following problems: the inequality between men and women, the absence of equivalent employment, women’s oppression, domestic violence, marriage as a tyrant state, and the wealth of the Kingdom distributed only to men. Fina d’Armada, who studied the case of Paula da Graça, proposes that “nobody is born a feminist. Nobody is a feminist only by wanting it. It happens by life circumstances, by an observational spirit of the world, by instruction.” Fina D’Armada: *The Feminist Book of 1715: The First Revolutionary Shout*. Oeiras 2005, p. 29.

³ Clara Sarmiento and Maria de Deus Manso: *Mulheres na expansão colonial portuguesa*. In: *A Expansão: quando o mundo foi português*. Da conquista de Ceuta (1415) à atribuição da soberania de Timor Leste (2002). Évora 2014, p. 332.

mother during the expedition to the West coast of Africa and the city of Goa (1871–1875); or in the form of personal diaries, as in the case of Isabel Pinto da França Tamagnini, who wrote during expeditions between Singapore and Dili (1882–1883).⁴

Historians, in turn, have long ignored the role of female actors in Portuguese history. Until the 1970s, the history of women was virtually a non-topic for debate among Lusophone historians investigating the history of the Portuguese empire, both on the continent and in Brazil. The pioneering work in this field by Elaine Sanceau and Charles Boxer gave rise to organized debate in Portugal at the international congress *O Rosto Feminino da Expansão Portuguesa*, of which the results were published under the same title in 1995.⁵ In the 1990s, Maria de Deus Manso, Timothy Coates, Leonor Diaz Seabra, Joseph Levi, Fina D’Armada and Clara Sarmiento deepened the discussion on the topic of the role of women in building the history of the Portuguese empire. In 2008, *Women in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: The Theater of Shadows* and *Condição Feminina no Império Colonial Português* were published by the Instituto Politécnico do Porto. On the other side of the Atlantic, in the Brazilian Academy, the theme of women, families, and sexuality was increasingly becoming the subject of academic debate, with such research being carried out by Beatriz Nizza da Silva, Mary del Priore, Marcia Amantino, Ronaldo Vainfas and Emanuel Araújo, among others.⁶ Clara Sarmiento and Maria de Deus Manso have developed a useful approach when analyzing the correspondence of women of the nineteenth century Portuguese empire, paying attention to the so-called “silent narrative,” meaning what can be drawn from such documents about their everyday and personal lives, the hopes and desires of such women within then-existing social structures.⁷

The documents studied in this chapter are petitions that were sent to King D. João V (1706–1750) by women living in the Portuguese colonies during the first

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 297–298.

⁵ Charles Ralph Boxer: *A Mulher na Expansão Ultramarina Ibérica 1415–1815: alguns factos, ideias e personalidades*. Lisboa 1975; Elaine Sanceau: *As mulheres portuguesas no ultramar*. Porto 1979.

⁶ Maria de Deus Manso: *Filhas esquecidas do Império Português: memória de mulheres na América*. In: *Naveg@merica*. Revista electrónica editada por la Asociación Española de Americanistas no. 15 (2015), pp. 4–7. <https://revistas.um.es/navegamerica/article/view/241461/183641>.

⁷ Sarmiento and Manso: *Mulheres na expansão*, p. 327.

half of the eighteenth century. The original documents are stored in the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* in Lisbon, Portugal. Many of these petitions concern inheritance; legal, family, business, or financial issues; as well as rights to land or requests for permission to return to Portugal. Such petitions contain expressions of dissatisfaction and complaints about injustices and lawlessness, against which Portuguese women dared to raise their voices. It is worth noting that these women lived in or were associated with all of Portugal's Atlantic colonies and were widows of men who held various positions in the colonial administration, such as governor, sergeant major (*sargento-mor*), municipal magistrate (*alcaide*), a doctor, and even a foreigner or exiled.

My purpose here is to amplify the voices of these women and contrast how they were considered by the society and how they fashioned their own self-images and questioned gender norms in the colonial world. Focusing on the rhetorical strategies used by the widows in their interactions with the monarch, this chapter pursues the following questions: what use did these letters have in self-positioning the widows within the existing colonial space? How did these women break with the early modern archetype of the devout and honorable mother, fashioning images of a deserving female subject in order to assume authoritative positions in socio-economic life and, finally, how far was a widow allowed to fashion her own identity, free from socio-cultural and legal factors?

Here I seek to demonstrate that having a long-distance relationship with the Lisbon administration helped such women to take the lead in efforts to be active and conscious members of colonial society. These petitions, I argue, reveal both an intensity of individual relationships and a broad range of social relationships that may help us to better understand gender norms in Portuguese colonial society and how such widows portrayed themselves in a world generally dominated by men.

THE WOMEN OF PORTUGAL'S OVERSEAS EMPIRE

In order to position such women in the context of the eighteenth-century Portuguese empire, we first need to understand how they arrived to the overseas territories, what difficulties they encountered, and what kinds of activities they were involved in. During the first decade after the Portuguese discovered a sea route to India in 1498, women were not allowed to make the journey. Their pres-

ence on board was forbidden and noncompliance with such legislation was a punishable crime.⁸ This prohibition was, in part, the result of superstitions about women on board – seen as a kind of *femme fatale* – who could cause a catastrophe at sea and lead to the death of the entire crew. This does not mean, however, that Portuguese women did not manage to get to the overseas colonies, as exemplified by Dona Isabel Pereira, who sailed to India during the second half of the sixteenth century, where she became the owner of a hospitality house in which she helped the sick and the poor.⁹

King D. Manuel I did not oblige men to live together with their wives in the overseas colonies, known as *conquistas*, for moving the family into an unknown part of the world came with high costs.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the king allowed and financed the so-called *Orfás del Rei*, to house orphan girls from good homes who had either lost their parents or were left under the care of the Crown. They were sent to the city of Goa in India, where they married Portuguese settlers in order to increase the Portuguese population. The *Orfás del Rei* was an important institution that guaranteed the continuity of the Lusophone presence in Asia. Yet this was not the only role Portuguese women fulfilled in the overseas colonies. Fernanda Angius has observed that they were there to bear Portuguese children but also to keep the men psychologically balanced and sexually satisfied, to be a continuation, property and inseparable element of man, and to guarantee socio-cultural stability at the service of a colonial occupation policy.¹¹

Under such conditions, it would be easy to conclude that the role of women was limited to the domestic sphere. Yet, Iberian historiography on the colonial discoveries and expansion is full of examples of strong and courageous women who belie this stereotype. An exceptional example is Dona Ana Pimentel, the wife of the first Brazilian governor of São Vicente, Martin Afonso de Sousa. Pimentel was the first woman to exercise executive power in Brazil, between 1534 and 1544. Appointed as her husband's procurator during the time he served in India, she took over the administration of his Brazilian captaincy, for which she super-

⁸ Sanceau: *As mulheres portuguesas no ultramar*, pp. 20-21.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 42-47.

¹⁰ Fernanda Angius: *Presença da mulher na legislação da expansão*. In: *Rosto feminino da expansão portuguesa*. Lisbon 1995, Vol. 1, p. 777.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 777-780.

vised plantations, controlled the cultivation of wheat and other crops, and contributed to the huge economic development of the region – all without having ever stepped onto the South American continent.¹²

Although Dona Ana Pimentel would never see the Brazilian colony, an indigenous woman from there was given the opportunity to visit Europe. Paraguaçu, daughter of the cacique (*morubixaba*) Taparica, leader of an indigenous tribe belonging to the Tupinambá family, married a Portuguese castaway, Diogo Álvares Correia, known better under the pseudonym Caramuru (“a man from the fire”).¹³ In 1528, they sailed to France, where she was baptized and received the Christian name of Catarina Álvares, in honor of Catharina des Ganches, the wife of the captain of the ship on which they had sailed. After returning to the American continent, they played a significant role in the history of Brazil in strategic and symbolic terms. In the north-western region of Bahia, Paraguaçu and Caramuru drew up a covenant between the indigenous Tupinambá peoples and the Portuguese. In addition, they created the first Christian family in Brazil, and Paraguaçu was identified with the biblical Eve, becoming the symbolic mother of all Brazilians.

It may also be observed that Portuguese women did exercise some power in the overseas colonies, such as Dona Brites de Albuquerque, who took over the duties of her husband, the captain-major of the Pernambuco captaincy. In 1553, she became the first female governor of the captaincy, an office that she occupied until 1584. Also worth mentioning is Inês de Sousa, wife of Salvador Correia de Sá, who organized the women’s paramilitary movement in 1583, which joined other rebellious groups in order to defend the city of Rio de Janeiro against a French invasion. One last example is Maria Rosa de Leitão, who in 1595 founded the *Recolhimento da Conceição* in the city of Olinda, which was destined to help women in need.¹⁴

Unfortunately, at present we know much less about women in Africa, Portuguese or indigenous. Tropical climate, fear of disease, and an unstable sociopolitical situation along the West Coast of Africa were not factors that favored the establishment of European families. During the earliest stage of colonization, a

¹² Janina Z. Klawa: O papel das mulheres nos descobrimentos e na expansão portuguesa. In: Rosto feminino da expansão portuguesa, Vol. 1, pp. 254-255.

¹³ Ibidem, pp. 254-255.

¹⁴ Ibidem, pp. 255-256.

woman in Africa was an object of fascination, desired but also feared. The physical appearance of black women was noted by, among others, the Portuguese chronicler Gomes Eanes Zurara (1410–1473), the Venetian traveler and merchant Alvise Cadamosto (1432–1488), and the German geographer Hieronymus Münzer (1437–1508). Michał Tymowski has noted that, during the early stage of the establishment of Luso-African contact, African women were seen as both the victims of slave hunting and a symbol of heroic resistance against white colonizers. Nonetheless, they later became concubines and partners of the Portuguese and, consequently, became their wives and mothers of their children.

Entering into the bonds of marriage with women from traditional clans allowed Portuguese sailors and merchants to embed themselves deeper within the West African cultures. Such women often became translators and intermediaries in the local trade.¹⁵ Thus, black women became “dynamic agents of the integration of Europeans in order to integrate them into African values,”¹⁶ while the mixed marriages acted to guarantee “greater social cohesion and a whitening process that could be synonymous of social mobility.”¹⁷ A revealing observation about this process of upward social mobility comes from a French agent and general of the Royal Company of Africa who, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, made trading voyages along North and South Guinee. In his journals, he observes that African women adopted European values and customs, giving an example of Dona Catalina, a black woman who was married to a Portuguese man and who, despite being surrounded by African servants, dressed like a European woman.¹⁸

Although little is known about such African women, we know even less about white Portuguese women in Africa. Unlike Asia, which for many Europeans became a symbol of unbounded riches and chances to realize social ascent, the African colonies were perceived as places with the smallest potential for promotion or rapid enrichment. Such a hierarchy of opportunities can likely explain the small share of Portuguese women and, in general, Portuguese families in Luso-

¹⁵ Michał Tymowski: Europejczycy i Afrykanie. Wzajemne odkrycia i pierwsze kontakty. Toruń 2017, pp. 279-280.

¹⁶ Alfredo Margarido: As mulheres outras nas ilhas atlânticas e na costa ocidental africana nos séculos XV a XVII. In: Rosto feminino da expansão portuguesa, Vol. 1, p. 367.

¹⁷ Arlindo Manuel Caldeira: As mulheres no quotidiano da ilha de São Tomé nos séculos XV e XVI. In: Rosto feminino da expansão portuguesa, Vol. 1, p. 503.

¹⁸ Margarido: As mulheres outras nas ilhas atlânticas, p. 370.

African societies. Despite the lack of available information, some things are known about some of the women, designated as *degradadas* (exiled), who were sent to Africa as part of their punishment for prostitution or minor offenses committed in Portugal. Additionally, it is written in the chronicles of Rui da Pina that, in 1482, several women sailed with the crew of Diogo de Azambuja to the territory of present-day Ghana, where the construction of the castle-factory of São Jorge de Mina began. Half a century later, King Manuel I issued a *Regimento* in which he defined the rules of conduct for European women living there and working in this overseas factory.¹⁹

In his work *Mulheres Aventureiras. Portuguesas espelhadas pelos quatro cantos do mundo* (2009), the journalist Rosário Sá Coutinho has described women who appeared in the fortified towns of North Africa in the sixteenth century. Although the study is not strictly academic, it presents revealing insights into the history of women in militarized regions dominated by men. Sá Coutinho refers to the biographies of D. Isabel Henriques, wife of the captain of Arzil; D. Mécia de Monroy, daughter of the captain of Santa Cruz to Cabo de Gué; and D. Maria d'Eça, who in the absence of her husband became Governor of Ceuta in 1548–1549, and who later became one of the wives of the Moroccan *xerife*. These women were, however, part of the elite, in contrast to Antónia Rodrigues, born to a poor Portuguese family, who at the age of twelve, disguised as a boy, managed to get to the city of Mazagão, where she lived for five years. In North Africa, it was much more common for Portuguese women to accompany their husbands on journeys to the Muslim countries of Africa, where their men held high positions and were responsible for the defense of the region. This was most likely due to the relatively close geographical distances, but it is possible that the metropolis wanted to maintain a white society relatively united and integrated in order to prevent eventual relations between white men and Muslim women. In this vein, the law then in force prohibited sexual relations between Christians and Muslims.²⁰ Women, however, did not accompany their husbands on transoceanic jour-

¹⁹ Tymowski: *Europejczycy i Afrykanie*, pp. 272–273.

²⁰ Título XXI. De Judeu ou Mouru que dorme com alguma Cristã. E Cristão que dorme com Moura ou qualquer outra Infiel. Coleção da Legislação Antiga e Moderna do Reino de Portugal (1514). Por resolução de S. Magestade de 2 de Setembro de 1786, p. 70.

neys to Brazil, southern Africa, and Asia, which were argued against as presenting costs that were too high for the Lisbon court.²¹

From the above examples, we can conclude that, although women appeared in numerous descriptions of the Portuguese colonial overseas empire, such accounts were written primarily by men. Consequently, from such descriptions we do not learn much if anything about colonial reality as seen through the eyes of the women involved. Michał Tymowski has drawn attention to the fact that testimonies of presence and activity in the Portuguese colonies often remain anonymous or are missing entirely as many women's written and artistic statements are still missing.²² If there were diaries or letters written by women from that period, we could learn more about their feelings, fears, and longings that tormented their emotions on the peripheries of the colonial empire.

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WIDOWHOOD

As already explained, in the early modern colonial world men defined women's identity in society: what a woman should be, what society required from her, and on what features feminine stereotypes were to be based. While portraying the ideal woman, authors such as Cristóvão da Costa,²³ Duarte Nunes de Leão,²⁴ Luís dos Anjos,²⁵ Diogo Manuel Aires de Azevedo,²⁶ and Damião de Froes Perim²⁷ praised above all her chastity, honesty, constancy, silence, justice, self-communion, courage, heroism, and talent in letters and art. However, married women were even more valued in society. Many authors praised their dignity, the noble status of the wife, and her dependence on her husband. Such an idealized woman – seen

²¹ Boxer: *A Mulher na Expansão Ultramarina Ibérica*, pp. 15–16.

²² Tymowski: *Europejczycy i Afrykanie*, p. 282.

²³ Author of *Tratado em lavour das mulheres e da castidade, honestidade, silêncio e justiça*, (1525).

²⁴ Author of *Descrições do Reino de Portugal* (1610).

²⁵ Author of *Jardim de Portugal em que se dá notícias de algumas santas e outras mulheres ilustres em virtude*, (1626).

²⁶ Author of *Portugal ilustrado pelo sexo feminino* (1736).

²⁷ Author of *Teatro Heroino – abecedário histórico e catálogo das mulheres ilustres em armas, letras, ações heroicas e artes liberais* (1736 and 1740).

as a woman-mother, woman-wife, and woman-daughter – was maintained in Portugal until at least the nineteenth century.²⁸

One of the most controversial works in this regard is Francisco Manuel de Melo's *Carta de guia de casados*, published in 1650, in which the author – a nobleman, military hero, and politician – gave guidance on the essentials of a successful marriage. According to Melo, a woman was the property of her husband, and the less cultured she was, the more faithful she became. Additionally, he admitted that women should not be involved in any debates regarding politics, government elections or war, as it made him angry.²⁹ This work was published in a year when peace was re-established on Portuguese lands and the country was reborn as an independent realm. It seems, however, that little changed in the lives of Portuguese women, whose existence was further limited to the four walls of their own homes. Even their everyday paths were marked out and limited between home and the church. One traveler who visited Portugal at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries observed the following:

“The woman from Lisbon awaits the processions of Lent with great impatience because, on this occasion, she is allowed to go out into the street to attend the ceremonies. Those women who have a desire to take advantage of this time of freedom for other purposes can do so without danger, and it is almost impossible to spy on them, because of the large number of women on the streets [...], while the husbands sleep peacefully, remaining firm in their conviction that they should not gainsay the devotion [...] of their wives; some people say that such encounters are not forgotten and, on these occasions, many women recover from having lived under [their husband's] control.”³⁰

As we can see, women living in Portugal seemed to live in isolation. The married ones spent most of their time at home, intimidated by their jealous husbands. Although Baroque women were praised for being heroic, artistic, polite, and holy, they remained unnoticed. Their education was still under the

²⁸ Those who also wrote about such features of the perfect woman were, among others, João de Barros (*Espelho de casados*, 1540) and Diogo Paiva de Andrade (*Casamento perfeito*, 1630). Maria Regina Tavares de Silva: *Estudos sobre a mulher em Portugal – breve perspectiva histórica*. In: *Rosto feminino da expansão portuguesa*, Vol. 1, pp. 63–66.

²⁹ Francisco Manuel de Melo: *Carta de Guia de Casados*. Available at: <https://www.luso-livros.net/Livro/carta-guia-casados/> [Accessed: April 15, 2018], pp. 71–72.

³⁰ Author's own translation. Cited in: Ana Hatherly: *Tomar a palavra. Aspectos da vida da mulher na sociedade barroca*. In: *Revista de Ciências Sociais e Humanas*, no. 9 (1996), p. 272.

control of a man or family. However, the seventeenth century opened up some new possibilities for Portuguese women to escape from this control, one of which was a career in religious institutions. To many girls and young women, living in a convent provided better opportunities than marriage, as it freed them from husbands who abused and mistreated them or, in extreme cases, could even kill them without being punished for their crimes.³¹ Clara Sarmento and Maria de Deus Manso have drawn attention to the challenges of women living in colonial Brazil, dominated by patriarchal relations that subjected them to subservience and deprived them of the right to express their opinions. Not only did those coming from higher social classes live there in isolation until the mid-nineteenth century, but the Church played a significant role in upholding patriarchal ideology and asymmetrical relations between women and men as well.³²

If marriage posed many limitations on a woman's life, widowhood in the early modern world was even worse. Widows were often constituted as a separate social group in Europe. In the British world, Jaqueline Eales has noted that, whereas the national literature divided men with regard to their status or social rank, women were supposed to fit into one of three groups: virgins, wives, or widows.³³ It was believed that their proper sphere was limited to the family in which they should obediently fulfil their duties in one of these roles.³⁴ Meanwhile, as Janine M. Lanza has observed, in French society widows constituted a completely separate group, “neither as a woman nor, certainly, as a man.”³⁵ Although this status enabled them to receive some economic privileges that would allow them to perform certain duties like men, they were still unable to compete with them in the economic sphere because of gender discrimination. Men were afraid that widows would disturb the well-ordered hierarchical society, based on a patriarchal structure. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers described widows as “sexually

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 270–272.

³² Sarmento and Manso: *Mulheres na expansão*, p. 294.

³³ Jaqueline Eales: *Women in early modern England, 1500–1700*. London 1998, p. 24.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

³⁵ Janine M. Lanza: *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law*. Aldershot 2007, p. 8.

wanton,” “greedy wastrels,” and “unstable, irrational, incapable of controlling their sexual urges, and ultimately untrustworthy.”³⁶

According to the *Ordenações Filipinas*, a legal compendium composed after the King Philip II of Spain also became King of Portugal in 1580, widows were granted some freedom in deciding about their patrimony, but female inferiority was still strongly visible.³⁷ First, after her husband’s death, a woman became the head of the family, providing that at the time of his death they lived as husband and wife, and she was the one who divided the inheritance between their heirs.³⁸ The law, however, also pointed to the lack of rationality of women (“fraqueza do entender das mulheres viúvas”), who at the time of their widowhood would become poor and needy and, intentionally or not, could squander their entire estate.³⁹

Nonetheless, the law, as written, did not always reflect reality. Although Portuguese legislation granted women certain rights, early modern societies were often governed by their own local laws and practices. Such a situation can be illustrated by the curious example of Clara Lopes. Lopes, who lived in poverty in mid-eighteenth-century Coimbra, suffered female oppression during her marriage to Pedro Dias, who jealously kept her at home. After the death of her husband, she

³⁶ Ibidem, pp. 1-4.

³⁷ Some of the laws dedicated to women and widows in the *Ordenações Filipinas* are for example: Livro 2 Tit.37: Das mulheres, que têm coisas da Coroa do Reino, e se casam sem licença del rei, Livro 3 Tit. 47: Que o marido não possa litigar em juízo sobre bens de raiz sem outorga de sua mulher, Livro 4 Tit. 46: Como o marido e mulher são meeiros em seus bens, Livro 4 Tit. 48: Que o marido não possa vender, nem alhear bens sem outorga da mulher, Livro 4 Tit. 60: Do homem casado que fia alguém sem consentimento de sua mulher, Livro 4 Tit. 61: Do benefício do Senatus consulto Velleano, introduzido em favor das mulheres que ficam por fiadoras de outrém, Livro 4 Tit. 64: Da doação de bens móveis feita pelo marido sem outorga da mulher, Livro 4 Tit. 65: Da doação feita pelo marido à mulher ou pela mulher ao marido, Livro 4 Tit. 85: Dos que não podem ser testemunhas em testamentos, Livro 4 Tit. 94: Como o marido e mulher sucedem um a outro, Livro 4 Tit. 95: Como a mulher fica em posse e cabeça de casal por morte de seu marido, Livro 4 Tit. 105: Das mulheres viúvas que casam de cinquenta anos tendo filhos, Livro 4 Tit. 106: Das viúvas que casam antes do ano e dia, Livro 4 Tit. 107: Das viúvas que alheam como não devem e desbaratam seus bens, Livro 5 Tit. 38: Do que matou sua mulher, por a achar em adultério. For more information see also: A mulher em Portugal: Alguns aspetos do evoluir da situação feminina na legislação nacional e comunitária, Vol. 1. Lisboa 2014.

³⁸ Ordenações Filipinas, Livro 4, Título XCV, “Como a mulher fica em posse e cabeça de casal por morte de seu marido.” Brasília 2004, p. 949.

³⁹ Ordenações Filipinas, Livro 4, Título CVII, “Das viúvas, que alheiam, como não devem, e desbaratam seus bens,” Brasília 2004, pp. 1015-1016.

became the sole breadwinner of the family, automatically being forced to look for a job, which she found in the public sphere by helping the poor and the sick. Unfortunately, Clara had to face stereotypes about women working at night in public areas, according to which she would not only be a “public woman” but also a witch. One night, while providing help to one sick student from Coimbra, she was severely beaten by him, becoming in consequence physically disabled. As an argument to justify self-defense, the student claimed he got scared because she could be a witch. According to Arilda Ines Miranda Ribeiro, who has studied Lopes’ trail, it is unclear whether her case was recounted by Lopes herself or if it was elaborated by a man. If written by her, it would mean that, despite all legal and social constraints, Lopes attempted to fashion her gender identity against written and unwritten socially acceptable norms. Meanwhile, as Clara Lopes became a kind of legend and her story was generally seen as a warning to women against exercising any rights outside the home, it could indicate that somebody – likely a man – may have used her image to speak on her behalf. Consequently, her self-fashioning, in this case, may not have been an independent process and could have been shaped by others who sought to maintain (male) hegemony over society.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, her example certainly reveals the difficulties and challenges for women who struggled to alter gender norms in early modern Portuguese society.

Fortunately, neither men’s fears nor their desire to maintain traditional relations between women and men could withstand the changes of the time. The unstable political and economic situation, civil and international wars, and migrations disturbed the traditional order. As Alysso M. Poska has observed, during the early modern period, peasant women in Galicia, a peripheral region in the north-western part of Spain, gained significant social and economic authority as a result of the extremely high rates of male migration and the relative weakness of the nobility, as well as secular and ecclesiastical institutions, compared the big Spanish cities. Poska seeks to refute traditional ideas about the role of women based on female chastity, showing that there were other factors, including demographic, economic and cultural, that could define gender norms better than honor based on female chastity. One of Poska’s theses is that the formation of gender

⁴⁰ Arilda Ines Miranda Ribeiro: Vestígios da educação feminina no século XVIII em Portugal. São Paulo 2002, pp. 112-117.

norms was a very complex process that went beyond the cultural norms set from above. In her own words:

"I am not arguing for the existence of a matriarchal society [...] or saying that women in anyway ruled men. This was not an ideal world of sexual harmony or gender equality [...]. Nevertheless, the convergence of a number of factors, including demography, economy, and cultural traditions, produced gender norms and relationships that made women central to Galician society, and women recognized the degree to which Galician culture revolved around them."⁴¹

As far as the Portuguese empire is concerned, Charles Boxer has proposed that the widows of the Portuguese overseas territories – regardless of their wealth – lived a much calmer life than married women. Their relative economic independence can also be shown through statistics: in 1759, in the Brazilian north-eastern region of Santo Amaro, there were thirty-seven landlords of sugar plantations and already six landladies; meanwhile, the census carried out in Goiás in 1818 showed that there were women who owned sugar mills, not because they had inherited them, but because they had bought them along with slaves.⁴²

It is also worth referring to a notion presented by Cynthia E. Milton who analyzed petitions of Spanish widows in the Latin American colonies. Milton sees a linkage between a gender culture and a political culture, as a consequence of which the widow oscillated between the law that portrayed her as a defenseless woman and a weak political actor while, at the same time, it legitimized her relationship with the king's patriarchal authority.⁴³

Building on the above-developed hypothesis regarding the complex socio-cultural circumstances of gender construction and drawing on Milton's idea of the interrelation between gender and political cultures, the following section explores the lives of women in the Atlantic overseas colonies of the early modern Portuguese empire. Far away from royal and political institutions, Church authorities, or the static family-based hierarchies of the metropole, it seems that *Fado* (*fatum*, fate) gave them a chance to create their own spaces within patriarchal society and

⁴¹ Allyson M. Poska: *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain. The Peasants of Galicia*. New York 2006, p. 21.

⁴² Sarmiento and Manso: *Mulheres na expansão*, p. 319.

⁴³ Cynthia E. Milton: *The Many Meanings of Poverty: Colonialism, Social Compacts, and Assistance in Eighteenth-Century Ecuador*. Stanford 2007, pp. 100-101.

to re-shape gender norms in a male-controlled world. It is also worth reflecting upon the question of how Stephen Greenblatt's argument about early modern self-fashioning processes involving a submission to an "absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self" holds up in these widows' petitions.⁴⁴

FASHIONING THE DESERVING FEMALE COLONIAL SUBJECT

The historical analysis undertaken in this chapter covers selected petitions sent by Portuguese widows from throughout the empire during the reign of King D. João V (1706–1750). During the first half of the eighteenth century, when the Portuguese court belonged to the wealthiest and most prestigious of Europe, these women sent to the metropolis more than one hundred and sixty petitions from the regions of present-day Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinee-Bissau and Saint Thomas and Princes Islands. By far the most important issue in these petitions was each petitioner's economic situation. Women asked the Crown for financial support, reimbursements, and the payment of wages due to their deceased husbands. The second most frequently discussed topic was children (e.g., guardianship or the administration of property) and legal issues that involved various law enforcement agencies, such as *Relação da Bahia* or *Tribunal Mesa de Consciência de Ordens*. Next in importance were financial issues related to, among other issues, household management, plantations or sugar mills (*engenhos*), and the confirmation, demarcation, or recovery of land rights. The common denominator of the studied petitions is the opposition of these widows to the injustices they had to face.

Before proceeding, it is worth considering what can and cannot be found in these petitions. It is certain that they were not written by the widows themselves but, rather, by notaries, lawyers, and royal officials, who partly used the typical formulations that also appeared in by the petitions sent by male colonists or their descendants to acquire favors from the Crown. Rhetoric in these petitions can, thus, be seen as a logical outcome of the widespread political ideal that the king needed to take care of his vassals and subjects in their times of need. On the other hand, the documents still allow us to hear the voices of the petitioning women and gain a better understanding of their situations within the colonial reality and their

⁴⁴ Stephen Greenblatt: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. London 1980, pp. 3-9.

critical perceptions of it. Unfortunately, however, we will not be able to find information about their most personal thoughts and experiences. It is also impossible to analyze, for now, how much they may have differed from women living in Portugal, but it is worth analyzing what their social positions and a broad range of relations were as well as to what degree they were detached from the traditional image of woman promoted in their homelands.

In the petitions sent by the Portuguese widows, they were portrayed as “poor,” “helpless” and living in “miserable conditions,” but such words seem to have had a different purpose than we would normally expect. The women may not have wanted to complain directly about their lives but, instead, wanted to arouse the king’s pity, so that he would make a decision in their favor. According to canon law at the time, they belonged to a group called *miserabiles personae*, who the church and state were obliged to support in financial and legal terms. It seems that they consciously emphasized and self-fashioned their weakness as women, using this condition to negotiate with the king. This can be seen in the example of Micaela Maria de Assunção, a resident of the Kingdom of Angola, and the widow of Romão de Pina, a defamed exile who was sent to Angola as a punishment for counterfeiting money. In a petition sent in 1725, Micaela asked the king for permission to leave Angola. After the death of Romão de Pina, she portrayed herself as “helpless,” living in a “miserable state” and suffering “annoyance.” To make matters worse, she was the mother of three children, João, José, and Ana, whom she had under her guardianship. It is worth mentioning that by giving the names of the children, it brought them out of a state of being anonymous. In the end, Micaela asked the king to aid her out of her condition of “helplessness” by allowing her and her children to go to Rio de Janeiro, where she had family who were willing to support them.⁴⁵

A similar strategy was taken by Teresa Maria de Jesus, a resident of the region of Pará, who used the argument of being too “old” and “poor” to maintain her domestic servants. One indigenous and three Zambo (*cafuzas*) women, one of whom had a child, desired to remain in her house after the death of her husband, Josef

⁴⁵ Requerimento de Micaela Maria da Assunção, viúva do degredado Romão de Pina, ao rei D. João V, September 13, 1725. Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino de Lisboa (hereafter AHU), Angola, Cx. 24, Doc. 2423.

Coelho.⁴⁶ All these women were “free from captivity,” but they wanted to continue to serve their landlady. Yet, for some unknown reason, perhaps financial, they were obliged to leave. Teresa Maria de Jesus stressed that they worked for her without being enslaved, and some were even brought up in her company.⁴⁷ Antonio de Faria, holding the position of *Procurador dos Índios* (Procurator of the Indians) created by the Portuguese Crown with the purpose of looking after the interests of the indigenous populations, confirmed that, since the *cafuzas* wanted to continue in her service by their own will, it seemed fair to grant Teresa Maria de Jesus what she asked for. In the document, good or even family-like relations were noted between Teresa Maria de Jesus and her servants, to whom she left the right to choose whether to continue working for her or not. It is unclear whether Teresa Maria de Jesus looked to the Crown for assistance because she decided to stand in defense of those who could not do so for themselves or, maybe, she defended her own social status by avoiding the loss of her servants, which would mean a considerable drop in status. Moreover, it is curious that such requests regarding domestic issues were sent to the king in Portugal and not to local authorities and that the petition was checked by the *Procurador dos Índios*.

Feminine weakness was also mentioned by an English lady, Isabel Houblon, probably living in Lisbon, a widow of a Portuguese businessman. Houblon was seeking reimbursement of a debt that was owed to her and to her husband, Antonio Monteiro, who had been a rich and influential proprietor of a Brazilian sugar plantation in the city of Boa Vista in Paraíba. The person she delegated to represent her was Henrique Gibbin, a merchant in Pernambuco, through whom Houblon asked King D. João V to order the local judge (*ouvidor-geral*) from Paraíba to issue an enforceable letter against Antonio Monteiro for debt reimbursement, as she hoped to recover the money that belonged to her husband. Houblon assessed her situation as being “unjust,” arguing that she was a poor woman who was without any livelihood while her debtor continued to be wealthy. She most probably used the argument about her poverty to negotiate with the king as well

⁴⁶ Josef Coelho is not a complete name. The middle name is missing due to the illegibility of the petition, which is now in poor condition.

⁴⁷ Requerimento de Teresa Maria de Jesus, viúva e moradora na cidade do Pará, para o rei D. João V, February 27, 1737. AHU, Pará, Cx. 19, Doc. 1825.

as to intervene in the internal affairs of the north-eastern Brazilian region.⁴⁸ At the time of the filing of the petition, Houblon was not in Brazil but in Portugal. As it turns out, there were more such cases. One example is that of Maria da Cunha, whose husband Gregorio Pires da Costa was brutally killed in the mines of Ouro Preto. Although she lived in the north of Portugal, she demanded justice through her lawyer despite the distance.⁴⁹ The example of Houblon shows, however, that women not only recognized and disagreed with the gender injustices of colonial Portugal but also engaged in fighting against men who held high and prestigious social positions.

This self-confident attitude can be also seen in a petition sent to the king in 1738 from the Brazilian city of Recife by Gracia da Cruz e Silva, the widow of Doctor Manoel da Fonseca Marques. She asked the king to arrest the influential and wealthy Miguel Carneiro da Cunha, who was responsible for the murder of her husband and who, out of fear of punishment, escaped and was hiding on the plantation belonging to his father. Gracia da Cruz e Silva took up the fight not only against a high-ranking man, who held the position of Cavalry Coronel (*coronel de cavalaria*) and sergeant major, but above all against an extremely influential family in the region. The Carneiro family came to Pernambuco from the Portuguese region of Minho before the Dutch invasion, giving rise to the noble line of Carneiros in Brazil. Members of this family performed high-level functions in the region for many generations. Additionally, they owned a sugar cane plantation, which was a symbol of wealth and prestige, soon becoming one of the most influential families in Pernambuco.⁵⁰ Gracia da Cruz e Silva asked the king to order the *desembargador* (appellate judge) and *ouvidor geral* (chief crown justice) to arrest those who were responsible for the murder of her husband, whom she mentioned by name and surname, and asked for the detention of the sergeant

⁴⁸ Requerimento de Isabel Houblon, viúva inglesa, por seu procurador e homem de negócio, Henrique Gibbin, ao rei D. João V, January 30, 727. AHU, Paraíba, Cx. 7, Doc. 539.

⁴⁹ Requerimento de Maria da Cunha, viúva de Gregório Pires da Costa, June 19, 1725. AHU, Minas Gerais, Cx. 6, Doc. 590.

⁵⁰ Rafael Chambouleyron and Karl-Heinz Arenz (eds.): *Poderes, negócios e saberes: elites plurais num império multifacetado*. Belém 2014, pp. 14-15.

major. Assuming a very forward position, she expressed great hope that “the King will do what is right and fair.”⁵¹

The petition was sent to Portugal more than a year after the murder. Perhaps this was due to logistical problems and transport, or maybe it took so much time to gather all the information about the mentioned assassination. The petition included details of the place and time of the homicide as well as of the circumstances and people who Gracia da Cruz e Silva claims contributed to the death of her husband. According to the petition, the sergeant major ordered the death of her husband, because he did not want to support him in a case regarding another colonel, who went by the name of João de Barros Braga. Dona Gracia used phrases such as “it seems to me” (*parece-me*) and “I heard” (*ouvi-dizer*) several times, which appear to indicate that she received information about the murder from third parties.

Gracia da Cruz e Silva’s petition reveals, beside her act of bravery in submitting it, her self-fashioning practices within the paternalistic and authoritarian society of colonial Brazil, where women had been excluded from the public sphere until the nineteenth century. The first law permitting them to take up education in primary schools came into force in 1827. At that time, the famous feminist book, Nísia Floresta’s *Direitos das mulheres e injustiça dos homens* (1832) was also published and provoked reflection on the social status and gender identity of women, who were still considered incapable of performing public functions. To the contrary, *Direitos das mulheres* defended the active participation of women in commanding positions. Gracia’s petition, sent one century before this book’s publication, shows how women were already reaching beyond the private into the public sphere, presenting herself as a credible legal witness testifying on behalf of her husband. She is portrayed in the petition as a woman who was well-informed about her husband’s professional activity and seemed to be aware of existing social relations. Additionally, she revealed details about the business and demonstrated her knowledge of local political and social correlations, indicating that the sergeant major was a “friend” of other officials, which would make it impossible to solve the problem at the local level.

Fighting against influential men and seeking to determine what is right and wrong was not only the domain of women living in or related to the Brazilian

⁵¹ Requerimento da viúva do doutor Manoel da Fonseca Marques, Gracia da Cruz e Silva, ao rei D. João V, March 31, 1738. AHU, Pernambuco, Cx. 51, Doc. 4528.

colonies. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, on the Cape Verde Islands, Portuguese widows also demanded justice as they opposed high-ranking officials. Illustrative here is the case of Dona Isabel de Barros Verra, widow of the former governor, Rodrigo de Oliveira da Fonseca, and a resident of the island of Santiago of Cape Verde. Barros Verra sent a petition to the king in 1724 in which she complained about Martinho Tavares de Fonseca, described as an evil and wicked man (*facinoroso*) who was unafraid of God or justice and had committed countless crimes. Together with his accomplices, whom she described as “wicked bandits,” he brought cattle to Barros Verra’s plantations, on which she cultivated wool and corn. She sent her slaves to chase the cattle away, but Tavares de Fonseca started shooting at them with weapons forbidden by the “newest laws” (*leis novissimas*) – almost killing them.

Confronted with the damage done to her plantations by the cattle, Dona Isabel turned to the *ouvidor-geral* for help, accusing Martinho Tavares de Fonseca of destroying her land and using forbidden weapons. Unfortunately, the governor of the island, António Vieira, who was the “particular friend and defender” of the accused, made it impossible to solve this problem at the local level. Therefore, she asked the king to order the *ouvidor-geral* to arrest Tavares de Fonseca together with his accomplices and send them to the Limoeiro prison in Lisbon, where they could be tried. The fact that Martinho Tavares de Fonseca and other robbers remained at large was assessed by her as a “great impertinence.”⁵²

In another fight against injustice and omnipotent officials on the Cape Verde Islands, the plaintiff, Dona Maria José, did not use an argument about her weakness. On the contrary, she issued harsh judgments about high-ranking officials and influential men. Her husband, António Vieira, the governor of Cape Verde – whom we have just seen obstructing justice in the Barros Verra case – died as a consequence of stones being thrown at him, while her son, who held the position of sergeant major, was forced to flee to the coast of today’s Guinee. In her petition, Maria José informed the king about this incident and asked him to arrest and punish João Pereira do Carvalho and his “criminal” brother-in-law, Pedro Cardoso do Amaral. She also requested that he punish the *ouvidor-geral*, Sebastião Bravo Botelho, for insolence and improper legal procedures. Maria José

⁵² Requerimento de Dona Isabel de Barros Bezerra, viúva do antigo governador de Cabo Verde, Rodrigo de Oliveira da Fonseca ao rei D. João V, January 24, 1724. AHU, Cabo Verde, Cx. 10, Doc. 934.

made it appear as if she spoke in the name of the local community, often using expressions that referred to the opinion of the majority, highlighting that this incident caused “general scandal in society” (*escândalo geral do Povo*). She also stated that she had been informed that the *ouvidor-geral* had falsely accused her son of crimes he did not commit and that the official had done so because of some particular interests “of which she had been informed.” Significant here is that, unlike our previous examples, in her fight against the unjust political model of the Cape Verde Islands, Maria José neither invoked her weakness – her feminine inferiority – nor referred to herself as a widow and mother.⁵³

In a petition sent in 1732 from the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, Dona Francisca Josefa de Sousa, the widow of its former governor, José Pinheiro da Câmara, asked the king to order António Mendes, the *provedor* of the *Fazenda Real* and the captain of the island of the Príncipe, not to prevent her from selling fruits. Josefa de Sousa was a noblewoman who was passing through financial difficulties at that time. In her petition, it is explained that Manuel de Castro e Macedo, *provedor* of the *Fazenda Real* on the Island of São Tomé began legal proceedings against her after Jose de Crasto Rosa had demanded money that her deceased husband owed him. The king stood in Josefa de Sousa’s defense, which led Antonio Mendes, acting out of “hatred,” to impede her from selling fruit. Without being able to pursue her only profitable business, she was “reduced to the greatest misery by not having enough to feed herself and her family, the reason why she was in extreme need.” Therefore, she asked the king that neither the officials nor others to whom this matter could apply be allowed under any pretext forbid the sale of fruits, as it would affect all inhabitants of the islands.⁵⁴

However, not only colonels and royal officials were the cause of complaints by Portuguese widows in the colonies. They even dared to fight against the clergy and the Church. In 1733, Catarina Silveira, the widow of Manuel Fialho de Oliveira, sent a petition to the king to order priests from the Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to refrain from unlawfully taking away land from the inhabitants of the region, which resulted in misery as the population was deprived of their

⁵³ Requerimento de Dona Maria José, viúva do antigo governador de Cabo Verde, António Vieira ao rei D. João V, October 27, 1727. AHU, Cabo Verde, Cx. 12, Doc. 1126.

⁵⁴ Requerimento de D. Francisca Josefa de Sousa, viúva do antigo governador de São Tomé, José Pinheiro da Câmara ao rei D. João V, September 24, 1732. AHU, São Tomé, Cx. 6, Doc. 650.

livelihoods. Catarina de Vieira also wrote to the king in the name of the inhabitants of the region and, despite the fact that there were men in her surroundings, the document was written on her behalf in order to protest the violence enacted by the priests, who wanted to deprive the inhabitants of access to their lands by force.

Vieira emphasized that the lands were legally granted to her deceased husband by a document known as a *Carta de Sesmaria*, signed by the king and legally handed over to Manoel Fialho de Vieira. The lands had brought profits to both settlers and the royal treasury, because tithing and all other taxes were regularly paid. Yet, without royal consent, clerics decided to occupy the lands, which, as Catarina noticed, was incompatible with the current law, *leis novissimas*, which held that the land belonged to those who cultivated it. In her opinion, the priests had brought irreversible destruction, because they did not pay tithes or any other taxes, which "was noticed by her, the settlers, and the other residents." However, she worried because the "priests are the [ones] in power in this captaincy, they always get what they want."⁵⁵

Also on the Cape Verde Islands, Filipa Tavares, widow of the former municipal magistrate (*alcaide geral*), André Correia, decided to stand against the clergy as well by informing the king about the murder of her husband. According to her petition, Father Manuel Ribeira de Macedo from the brotherhood of São Pedro dos Clérigos invited André Correia to his plantation in Tamboa, where he was murdered by the cleric's slaves. Filipa Tavares objected to the fact that no one had been held responsible for the crime so far and both the clergyman and his slaves were "still immune and walking scandalously in the presence of justices." Additionally, Tavares blamed them for being in possession of a weapon that was legally banned.⁵⁶ Filipa referred to the "miserable state" in which she found herself after the death of her husband, because of the "violence" from which he died and, additionally, the lack of proper legal proceedings. A case had actually been initiated by the local judge, Luis Tavares Vilhado, which, unfortunately, was halted by *ouvidor-geral* Sebastião Bravo Botelho. Therefore, she asked the king to

⁵⁵ Requerimento de Catarina Silveira, viúva de Manuel Fialho de Oliveira para o rei D. João V, March 10, 1733. AHU, Pará, Cx. 15, Doc. 1375.

⁵⁶ Requerimento de Filipa Tavares, moradora na ilha de Santiago e viúva do antigo alcaide geral, André Correia, ao rei D. João V. October 16, 1728. AHU, Cabo Verde, Cx. 12, Doc. 1143.

initiate new legal proceedings against Father Manuel Ribeiro de Macedo, to be charged for her husband's death, and to appoint a new minister who would lead the case.

The cases presented here of petitioning women reflect, above all, their particular attitudes concerning widowhood and their own self-fashioning practices living in overseas colonies. Regrettably, we do not have much reliable information indicating how the bureaucratic process itself went. A letter sent in 1756 by Dominican friar Dom Miguel de Bulhões, bishop and governor of Pará in the northern region of Brazil, to the state governor of Grão-Pará e Maranhão, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, found at the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa somewhat explains not only the procedure itself but also reveals an interesting aspect of the network of contacts that such widows might have created and lived in. In the letter, Bulhões said that he had received a petition from a woman that he did not know, named Dona Luisa de Sousa e Menezes. The document included three more letters from Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado and more than twenty by several people from the Court, all asking to send back a soldier, Antonio José de Vasconcelhos, Dona Luisa's son. Most of the included letters, supporting her request, belonged to noblemen and gentlemen of the Court.⁵⁷ Dom Miguel de Bulhões' letter itself is proof that the request of an unknown woman was able to become the subject of official correspondence between him and the governor of the state. Even more intriguing is the fact that Sousa e Menezes contacted the governor himself, as well as other high-ranking authorities at the royal court in Lisbon. Here we can see that such women were not only surrounded by people from different social classes but also aspired to themselves establish relationships with them.

CONCLUSION

In a world in which men were granted the power to shape the ideal of perfect feminine features, some widows who lived in the Portuguese overseas colonies managed to self-fashion new gender norms. In their petitions, they broke with the early modern archetype of both the devout and honorable lady and submissive mother and widow, assuming instead a bold and critical attitude towards a pater-

⁵⁷ Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, PBA 628, ff. 76-77, (f. 321).

nalistic and authoritarian society. Although it is not possible at present to determine how similar or different the situations were for Portuguese women living in Europe compared to those in the Atlantic colonies, it can be said that women in the overseas territories of the Portuguese Crown started to disagree with the world around them and criticize it sharply.

The petitions analyzed here make audible the voices of women who argued against the injustices of greedy men and the unjust colonial system itself. By going beyond the domestic sphere, they were able to present themselves as community leaders and guardians of justice. The widows studied here portrayed themselves as poor, old, helpless, and disabled women and mothers who lived in miserable conditions. Yet they turned the tables by using the law that generally limited them to demand that the king meet his obligation to provide them assistance. They even benefited, to some extent, from patriarchal and paternalistic norms by emphasizing the self-image of an inferior and weak widow so that they could demand justice, help, favors, and grace. The mixture of canonic and civil laws that limited them in the patriarchal world also provided them with legal means to protest against violence, injustice, omnipotent and high-ranking officials and men holding high and prestigious positions in society, including members of the clergy. Some of these women dared to assess what was right, wrong, unjust or "impertinent," issuing harsh judgments against those they accused, while others sent requests regarding domestic issues or asked the king to arrest or punish some men for insolence or improper legal procedures.

Self-fashioning practices enacted by widows inhabiting the Portuguese colonial peripheries seem to have been fairly different from Stephen J. Greenblatt's concept of early modern people constructing their identities by subjecting themselves to a powerful authority and the norms of womanhood it defined. The widows' construction of self also appears to have been defined by more than just the assumption of the legal role of the defenseless woman, seeking for the king's protection. Far away from the royal court in Lisbon, the nobility, the Church, and their own families, many of these women were confronted with circumstances that required them to assume a different role than what had been prescribed for them. Women gained power not only because they had access to control of economic resources but also because of new socio-political circumstances in the overseas possessions that allowed them to fashion a new self.

According to the perspective of Allysson M. Poska on constructing gender norms, self-fashioning is considered a complex process based on interactions between gender, politics, demography, sexuality, economy, and family structures in the patriarchal and male-dominated world of, in this case, the Portuguese Atlantic. It was in the colonies, below the equator, where they were enabled to exercise more power over themselves, families, friends, neighbors or even, to some extent, the royal administration. This study of the widow's petitions thus confirms Maria de Deus Manso's observation stated that "despite the control exercised over women, especially the white ones, many of them moved away from the model of a submissive woman and became active in the colonies."⁵⁸ Indeed, it should be emphasized that the new gender standards were associated almost exclusively with white Portuguese women – widows of high-ranking men.

Such widows' self-fashioning was, however, not free from socio-cultural and legal factors, and their identity construction was not completely autonomous. We turn here again to critically examining the self-fashioning theories proposed by Greenblatt. First, he claims that, "fashioning oneself and being fashioned by cultural institutions – family, religion, state – were inseparably intertwined."⁵⁹ Second, as mentioned above, for Greenblatt self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between authorities seeking to maintain control and the individual, struggling to balance submission and the preservation of his or her freedom.⁶⁰ The selves of the widows from the Portuguese Atlantic colonies examined here were, indeed, a product of different entwined factors that both shaped their images and helped them to fashion their own selves. However, their self-fashioning was not formed only in response to the authorities but was also complementary to written and unwritten norms established within the family or by Church and state, and the widows benefited from civil and canon law to negotiate their space within the colonies. Moreover, if we assume that petitions sent by them had to be written and edited by the representatives of royal institutions in the colonies, most likely by men, it would also mean that such Portuguese men agreed to the new roles that were being adopted by women living in overseas colonies. This could also mean that a certain dialogue emerged at the male–female level that went beyond the

⁵⁸ Manso: *Filhas esquecidas do Império Português*, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Greenblatt: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 256.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

existing set of control mechanisms. The widows' self-image, although being molded by different circumstances, factors and forces, was thus neither subverted nor lost in this process of identity formation.⁶¹ Rather, it was transformed from an externally fashioned submissive and weak spouse into a self-fashioned politically aware, dynamic and, often, working woman who contested the injustices of colonial reality. In proposing this form of advancement, I do not seek to deny that the colonial world was based on exploitation and gender inequalities. Yet, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, there was also an emerging space of new opportunities in which women could build and decide upon their own sense of self.

⁶¹ Greenblatt: *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, pp. 3-9.

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LILYAM PADRÓN REYES

“Que esta clase de gente no puede agregarse a los blancos ni pardos”. Ideas en torno al indio miliciano, su calidad social y auto-reconocimiento en Cuba, siglo XVIII

INTRODUCCIÓN

La presencia indígena en la Cuba colonial tomaría cuerpo en la fundación y el reordenamiento de los pueblos de indios, que desde mediados del siglo XVI serían establecidos en las cercanías de las poblaciones cabeceras de La Habana y Santiago de Cuba. Como parte de la implementación de las políticas oficiales desde los tiempos tempranos los indios estarían reconocidos y convocados en la defensa del territorio cubano frente a las amenazas externas que tendrá que hacer frente la Corona española en el Caribe desde fines del siglo XVI. De ahí que sean organizados en cuerpos de milicias que llevarían un peso considerable en la custodia y salvaguarda del espacio cubano.

Con el acontecer del siglo XVIII y la importancia de los cambios políticos, militares y económicos que tendrían una repercusión directa en la renovación de las defensas imperiales, la actuación de los grupos y castas¹ como negros, indios y mulatos se inscriben en el contexto político, donde la carrera militar significaría una posibilidad directa de ascenso social en el medio colonial.

En medio de las nuevas investigaciones,² y desde una visión de conjunto entre la historia atlántica y social, intentaremos el acercamiento a una realidad social, que no solo analice al individuo como objeto, sino como sujeto, en estrecha rela-

¹ El entramado de castas significará un proceso de estratificación social que vendría establecido desde los orígenes del individuo atendiendo a su nacimiento, y que sentaría un precedente para su desarrollo en el seno de la sociedad frente al poder colonial hispano.

² Véase: Juan José Benavides Martínez: *De milicianos del rey a soldados mexicanos. Milicias y Sociedad en San Luis de Potosí (1767-1824)*. Madrid 2014; Raquel Guereca Durán: *Milicias indígenas en la Nueva España: reflexiones del derecho indiano sobre los derechos de la guerra*, México D.F. 2016; Allan J. Kuethe y Kenneth J. Andrien: *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century: Wars and the Bourbons Reforms, 1713–1796*. Cambridge 2014.