Panel 15

WOMEN, LAND AND POWER IN THE EUROPEAN EMPIRES

(convenors: Eugénia Rodrigues & Mariana Cândido)

PROGRAMME

Part I
(19th July, 11:30-13:00)

Vanessa Oliveira
York University
Female landowners and entrepreneurs: food suppliers of 19th century Luanda.

Mariana Cândido
Princeton University
Women, family and wealth: engendering property in the 19th century Benguela.

Carmeliza Rosario
University of Bergen
Donas da terra: her-story on gendered power relations, reflections on variation and change in female land ownership and inheritance in the Zambezi Valley, Mozambique.

Part II
(19th July, 14:30-16:00)

Mariana Dantas
Ohio University
Succession strategies and property holding among widows of African descent in colonial Minas Gerais.

Douglas Libby
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Slave, freed, and free women: succeeding generations of Africans and Afro-descendants in eighteenth and nineteenth century Minas Gerais.

Clara Sarmento
ISCAP
Engendering power / empowering gender in colonial Brazil: Maria Bárbara, a woman of Engenho.

Verônica Daminelli Fernandes
Universidade Nova de Lisboa
Nationalism, gender and eroticism: the role of the Portuguese imperial tradition in the myth of the ‘Brazilian woman’

Part III  
(19th July, 16:30-18:00)

Maria Dávila  
CHAM (FCSH-UNL)  
*The woman who ruled the Atlantic: Dona Beatriz and the administration of the Atlantic Archipelagos (1470-1485).*

Maria Bastião  
CHAM | FCSH-UNL & Univ. Aç. and CEHC | ISCTE-IUL  
*Women and access to land on the island of Mozambique (mid-18th century).*

Eugénia Rodrigues  
Instituto de Investigação Científica Tropical  
*Women, land and power in the Zambezi valley in the early modern period.*
ABSTRACTS

Eugénia Rodrigues & Mariana Cândido
Women, land and power in the European Empires

European, mestizo and native women became important actors of the imperial societies. This panel aims to explore the dynamics associated to the relationship between land, women and power in the spaces related to European empires. The European expansion led to major changes in the social order of the world areas affected by imperial dynamics. Women became important actors of the imperial societies, not only European ones but also mestizo and native women. However, it must be considered that the roles played by women were socially constructed, therefore, the women’s agency ranged among empires and through time. This panel seeks to explore the dimensions of the relationship between women, land and power in European empires. The women’s access to land varied greatly in imperial spaces, according to the European homelands rules as well as those created by local dynamics. In some colonies, women had high opportunities to possess and administrate land, which gave them influence and power. This panel aims to discuss questions such as: How European rules and practices about land’s possession, inheritance and administration were reshaped in imperial territories? What role did access to land play in the social and geographical mobility of women? How the possession of land did underlie the influence and power of women? How did families and society understand the women access to land? How did imperial dominion affect the relationship between women and land in native societies? We seek for papers that consider any of these dimensions of the women role in the European empires, focusing empirically-grounded case studies, as well as discussing methodological and theoretical framework. We encourage proposals about any territory affected by the dynamics of the European empires, whether within its political boundaries, whether beyond them.

Vanessa Oliveira
Female landowners and entrepreneurs: food suppliers of 19th century Luanda.

This paper aims to show that the ownership of land created economic opportunities for women in Luanda, allowing them to enter the trade community and consequently the local elite. African and Eurafican women owned slaves, ships, rental and commercial houses, stores and plantations in 19th century Angola. Not a few of the most prominent female residents of Luanda, the capital of the Portuguese colony of Angola, owned plantations in the hinterland, particularly in Bengo region, where the water and foodstuff which supplied the city’s multiethnic population and the slave ships come from. Registers of crops entering the local public market confirm that women represented an important parcel of food suppliers in the port city. Therefore, this paper aims to show that the ownership of land created economic opportunities for women in Luanda, allowing them to enter the trade community and consequently the local elite.

Mariana Cândido
Women, family and wealth: engendering property in 19th century Benguela.

This study explores mechanisms through which women had access to and accumulated property and wealth in Benguela during the nineteenth century. A variety of primary sources will be analyzed including land tenure records and parish records. In the past decades, new studies have explored the role of gender in the shaping of colonial societies in the African continent, yet most of the scholarship focuses on the 20th century, and not much attention has been paid for previous centuries. Records from Benguela allow us to see the role of African women in an earlier period and reconstruct their families, access to labour, and explore new forms of production and control. In this study, I will explore mechanisms through which women had access to and accumulated property and wealth in Benguela during the nineteenth century. The study explores lives of merchant women analyzing their family connections and commercial partnerships in order to understand capital accumulation and social mobility. Baptism, marriage, and burial records allow us to explore how women built their families and wealth, established social networks, created new kinship, and had access to properties. In the process they claimed new social and economic positions in the colonial setting, accumulating dependents and wealth. Parish records allow us to access bits of information on the lives of women who did not leave written records and did not call attention of Portuguese authorities.
Carmeliza Rosario

Donas da terra: her-story on gendered power relations, reflections on variation and change in female land ownership and inheritance in the Zambezi Valley, Mozambique.

The Zambezi Valley, in Mozambique is a sociological construct; a produce of 16 century colonial exchanges of the Indian Ocean. Attempts to attract Portuguese settlers helped create a class of powerful landladies. I attempt to explore how women of the area currently reproduce the memory of this past. The Zambezi Valley, in Mozambique is a sociological construct. Portuguese colonial rule over this area, enacted initially from Goa instituted the prazo system; by leasing to settlers for a period of time. To attract more settlers, some prazos were given as dowry to girls who married Portuguese vassals; to be inherited through the female line, for at least three generations. Indigenous women in the region were also reportedly powerful landowners. Among the Marave, the wife of the karonga had jurisdiction over part of the territory. Female chiefs were also reported to have existed. Among the Shona, the wives of the mutapa had their own territory and could serve as ambassadors. Despite their notoriety, historical texts mention these women marginally or as surrogates to male dominance. This is not an accidental narrative. It stems from a male perception of female roles. By constructing a text which undermines processes through which women can access power, historians have neglected important factors which may have contributed to the rise of such women to power. Using Foucaultian and feminist anthropology approaches to power I propose to understand how women of this sociological space have been constructing the perception of their female ancestry's power. This approach assumes that women act through agency and are producers of their own position. Yet they are also constrained by social structures, within which they enact their agency. Finally, the significance of their actions is linked to a system of understanding shared by her and other subjects of the same structure.

Mariana Dantas

Succession strategies and property holding among widows of African descent in colonial Minas Gerais.

This paper will examine a few case studies from the judicial district of Sabará, in Minas Gerais, to explore how widows of African descent challenged legal restrictions that threatened their ownership and management of land and, in the process, contributed to the growth of the local economy. Portuguese inheritance laws protected wives' right to half of a couple's property in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais. Still, a husband's death often threatened the dissolution of the family estate to an extent where ownership of the meação (the spouse's half) could not ensure the family's livelihood and well-being. Moreover, women of African descent were often denied guardianship of their children and, consequently, control of their inheritance, which were placed instead in the hands of court appointed guardians. Given the potential constraints legal procedures imposed on these women, some African descendant and mixed-raced couples engaged in "vendas de meação" (sales of a spouse's half), which ensured the widow would remain in possession of the entire family estate after her husband's death. This practice protected women from the interference of the courts in matters of family and property and proved to be an effective strategy to secure ownership and the productivty of their agricultural and mineral lands. This paper will examine a few case studies from the judicial district of Sabará, in Minas Gerais, to explore how widows of African descent challenged legal restrictions that threatened their ownership and management of land and, in the process, contributed to the growth of the local economy.

Douglas Libby

Slave, freed, and free women: succeeding generations of Africans and Afro-descendants in eighteenth and nineteenth century Minas Gerais.

Examines the trajectory of 7 generations of Afro-Brazilian women and how they dealt with property and power in 18th- and 19th-century Minas. The unfolding lives of succeeding generations serve as a basis for analyzing family formation, social and gender relations, occupational and social mobility. This paper examines the trajectory of a West African slave couple and six generations of their descendents in the Vila do São José do Rio das Mortes over a period of some 160 years (c. 1735 - c. 1895), in particular the trajectory of the female members of this family. The research is based on diverse types of primary sources that are subjected to intense and systematic cross referencing. The narrative built around the unfolding lives of succeeding generations aims at providing a varied set of ways of analyzing family formation, certain levels of social and gender relations, occupational opportunities, and the complexities of social mobility in the context of a small urban center in colonial and provincial Minas Gerais. The extraordinary geographical stability of this "colored" family of what can be considered middling social and economic standing challenges the notion that non-elite populations were constantly on the move during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a similar vein, the remarkable importance that family relationships themselves took on over time is revealed when looking at patterns of repeated gestures of familial solidarity and inflection. Women (wives, daughters, sisters, aunts, mothers and daughters in law, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers) made important contributions to the rootedness and tight-knitted character of the family, claiming and holding on to their
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fair share of property as well as to the power forged out of the clan's hard-won respectability within the local community.

**Clara Sarmento**

*Engendering power / empowering gender in colonial Brazil: Maria Bárbara, a woman of Engenho.*

This paper explores the role of women, within and outside colonial structures of power, in colonial Brazil (1807-1823). We'll focus on Bárbara Garcez, whose life-story oscillated between the discourse of a dependent mother of family, and the reality of a sugar-mill manager, land and slave owner. This paper explores the intercultural experience between Portugal and Brazil, from 1807 to 1823, of two families from the Portuguese landed gentry, paying special attention to the intercultural process as lived by women. It sheds light into the role of subalterns, both within and outside structures of power, as in the paradigmatic character of Bárbara Garcez, represented both as a silent and dependent mother of family, and as determined manager of a sugar mill (engenho), an independent slave and land owner. The letters compiled in the Luso-Brazilian Correspondence (re)construct the polyphonic representation of a movement of personal, family, and social transculturation, that functions as a simultaneous translation of the historical events witnessed. This study articulates the contexts and situated objects of study, in order to understand different historical moments, rationalities and worldviews, as well as the cultural practices that move representations of reality. Although Bárbara Garcez became an important actor of the imperial society, her social agency was socially constructed, located (and limited) within the boundaries allowed by the structures of feeling and behaviour of the Portuguese overseas empire. Her access to land, slaves, capital, and power was made possible thanks to the peculiar dynamics of the hybrid space of Brazil, on the eve of independence. In this empirically-grounded case-study, European rules about land's administration are reshaped by the imperial territory, where the actual possession of the engenho simply unveils the authority of a woman that had by no means proved powerless in the complex politics of family and society.

**Verônica Daminelli Fernandes**

*Nationalism, gender and eroticism: the role of the Portuguese imperial tradition in the myth of the 'Brazilian woman'.*

This work seeks to think about how the Portuguese Imperialist logic used the native brazilian women's bodies to justify not only the geographic colonization of a virgin and uncivilized land, but also to justify a mestizo loving connection which validates the desire for the patriarchal order. In the Western tradition, the genders do not occupy the same positions in national beliefs, being experienced by men and women in a hierarchical manner. In the Brazilian case, the nationalistic imaginary seems to have been constructed from a indinastico woman's representation who has in the character "iracema" its greatest exponent. She is the starting point of the tradition started by the Portuguese Empire who built the description of the new land to be deflowered begining by the native woman to be conquered and filled by the colonizer's speeches. She is the porno-tropic myth that defines the center and gives meaning to the Portuguese Empire, the white male colonizer and the series of ideologies that diminishes women within the patriarchal paradigm. Her connection with the Portuguese man it's the base of the Brazilian mestizo nation, legitimizing the romance that creates/reflects the history of the country and validates the loving connection, being difficult to separate political ethics from erotic passion, nationalism and intimate sensitivity. In this sense, love and nation work by colonizing women's subjectivity on two levels: within the patriarchal speech and within the imperialist logic. The geographical spaces are therefore transformed in sexual areas. In Brazil, women's bodies were constructed as a limit, boundary of the cosmos and of the known world, where the European tradition eroticized the Brazilian women as exotics, a symbol of underdeveloped lands and with the need to be inseminated by superior civilizations, understanding the gender as crucial to maintain the security of the imperial logic.

**Maria Dávila**

*The woman who ruled the Atlantic: Dona Beatriz and the administration of the Atlantic Archipelagos (1470-1485).*

This communication studies the performance of the infanta Dona Beatriz as administrator of the archipelagos of Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde, an analysis that aims to be global and comparative, exploring her condition as a female ruler. The archipelagos of the Atlantic were the first spaces to be colonized by the Portuguese in the 15th century. These became spaces of experimentation of a model for administrative, territorial organization and economic exploitation that would subsequently be applied to other areas of the Empire. This colonization process acquired a distinct manorial nature as it was, from an early stage, carried out by the House of Viseu (i.e. Prince Henry the Navigator and his heirs). As from 1470 to mid 1480's this House was administered by a woman, the infanta Dona Beatriz, tutor to the new Duke, then a minor. For the first time in Portuguese History, an overseas

territory concerned the purview of a woman. Her actions in the insular space revealed to be extremely important, both for the settlement of the archipelagos of Azores and Cape Verde, as well as the economic growth of Madeira. However, her actions in the archipelagos and how she adapted to the various existing realities have never been analyzed in a global and comparative way. This is what we will do, by approaching issues such as how Beatriz exercised her power in the Atlantic; how the settlement and distribution of land was made during that period and how power was organized. We will also reflect about her condition as a female ruler and how that was regarded by her peers and by the men under her authority, as well as how she used the administration of these territories to uphold her power.

Maria Bastião

*Women and access to land on the island of Mozambique (mid-18th century).*

The present communication seeks to analyze the legal framework of access to land on the Island of Mozambique and the near hinterland, highlighting the role played by women as one of the main social and economic actors of insular life, as land owners and agricultural producers. In 1752 the territories of Mozambique and Rios de Sena stretched through the vast region of the Zambezi Valley and through a narrow strip of litoral land. Since the mid-1500s the Island of Mozambique had been the political capital of those territories. The land acquired by the Portuguese Monarchy in the Zambezi were considered land of the Portuguese Crown conceded to loyal subjects under a hybrid framework that combined legal aspects of emphyteusis with the granting of Crown-owned land. Not being mandatory, the grant and succession of these lands to women had become a common practice, mainly as a way to attract male settlers of European ascendancy or origin. Uncommonly in the Portuguese Empire, the female land owners of the Zambezi acquired a position of great social and economic influence. But if the regimen of the land grants in Rios de Sena has been largely studied, the question of ownership and property on the Island of Mozambique remains mostly unknown. This communication aims to approach this unknown subject. It therefore intends to analyze the legal framework of the leasing of lands located on the Island of Mozambique and its outskirts, by trying to understand the similarities and dissimilarities with the prazos of Rios de Sena, as well as the role played by women. Had the women of the insular elite gained an influence close to that of the female land owners of the Zambezi? And what was their importance in the context of land owners of the Island?

Eugénia Rodrigues

*Women, land and power in the Zambezi valley in the early modern period.*

This paper discusses how the land possession was related to the production of a remarkable power by the elite women in the Zambezi valley, within the context of the colonial and African societies. In recent decades, the historiography has recovered women from the invisibility to which the study of the human past had confined them. However, there are still scarce studies on the economic and political agency of women, particularly in the European empires. In the early modern Europe, theorists argued that women lacked reason and strength, so they didn't have the ability to govern, which was given to men. The model of power based on the political legitimacy (potestas) and the authority by force (potentia), applied to the relations between rulers and subjects, was used to justify women's subordination to men. Nevertheless, the implementation of European institutions in the imperial spaces redesigned, often, the social relationships that made women subordinated to men. In the colonial society of the Zambezi valley, where the Portuguese crown ruled a vast territory, women accessed to land and other means of economic, social and political relevance. While owners of the land, these women, mostly mestizo, acted as heads of households, managing multiple resources and, in particular, controlled the African inhabitants of these territories. This social role enabled them to build a remarkable power, which often was socially perceived as superior to that of the men. This paper discusses how the land possession was related to the production of a notable power by these women, within the context of the colonial and African societies. It will be considered the forms of formal power, as well as power as an interactive process dispersed in society, according to recent perspectives.