

**Ripping the Stitches and Spinning New Webs:
Women Forging Community in the Early Modern Iberian World
(Plenary themes: Communities and Exchanges)**

Conveners

Dr Jacqueline Holler, University of Northern British Columbia (history, colonial Latin America)

Dr Dana Wessell Lightfoot, University of Northern British Columbia (history of medieval Iberia)

Dr Allyson Poska, University of Mary Washington (history of early modern Spain)

Scholarly understandings of space have traditionally come from the images, maps, and words of men. Although recent conceptualizations of space have begun to integrate women's ideas, nevertheless scholars have devoted little research to understanding how early modern women experienced space and place. Although migration is often viewed as a masculine endeavor, mobility was a key component of women's lives and the early modern period is particularly rich for such analysis as European expansion offered women new opportunities for travel and migration. As they moved across geographic boundaries, women brought with them gendered notions of space and place that influenced their relationships and situated them in their new communities. This workshop will be formulated around understanding how Spanish women experienced travel and migration from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries on both sides of the Atlantic and how women's conceptualization of space changed with the evolution of the Spanish empire.

First, Dana Wessell Lightfoot will provide the context of pre-imperial Spain and how long before Columbus traversed the Atlantic, ordinary women moved around the peninsula, creating new relationships and formulating new identities. She will provide a short introduction to mobility in late medieval Spain and consider how socio-economic status affected women's ability to move from rural to urban, forming new social kin groups that acted much in the way that family did in smaller, more static societies. Using a petition for dowry restitution and separation of Gostança de Mur against Dalmau de Mur, the workshop participants will be able to assess a peninsular peasant woman's conceptualization of space, community and identity as she migrated to Valencia and created social networks which she then utilized successfully in mobilizing her dowry restitution case against her husband.

A century later, Spanish women's understanding of connection and isolation were transformed (or not) by the colonial setting. Jacqueline Holler will provide an introduction to women's transatlantic and local mobility in sixteenth-century New Spain and the ways in which this mobility affected women's kin and friendship networks and, thus, women's ability to negotiate domestic violence. Examining a late sixteenth-century divorce petition from Mérida (Yucatán), participants will see the potential for social isolation and despair inherent in one elite woman's experience of mobility, and thus the class-linked nature of women's ability to reconstitute community in the context of migration. The juxtaposition of this document with the discussion of women's migration will produce discussion on the many ways in which women may have understood early colonial New Spain as space of both amplified liberty and unfreedom.

By the end of the colonial period, Spanish women were subjects of a global empire. Allyson Poska will briefly describe her research on women and the Spanish attempt to colonize Patagonia at the end of the eighteenth century. Her documents, a series of brief petitions by women who want to volunteer for the colonization project, provide an opportunity to examine how ordinary women understood their place in the Spanish empire. Workshop participants will be able to discuss how women understood the transatlantic journey and the connections and disjunctions that transatlantic migration created among peninsular and colonial families and communities.

The organizers hope to facilitate the conversation through a series of open ended questions, including the following:

How did women understand their relationship to place? How did gender affect their desire and their ability to move from place to place? How did gender affect their relationships with their natal families and with their neighbors in their new homes? What, if any ways, did the colonial setting alter women's relationship with place?

As the format of this session is a workshop based on the active participation of all members, the organizers plan to keep their opening remarks brief (maximum of 5 minutes per person). We will then use the questions above as a means of framing our discussion, based on the primary sources readings circulated to participants in advance. Time will be set aside so that participants can ask their own questions and share aspects of their research to help think more broadly (including space, time period and across disciplines) about women, migration and mobility in the early modern Spanish world. We also plan to link our workshop to one proposed by Lisa Vollendorf to facilitate even great discussion amongst scholars from different disciplines whose work focuses on the early modern Spanish world.

Case of Domestic Abuse brought by Gostança de Mur against her husband, the tailor Dalmau de Mur—Court of the Governor in Valencia (August 5, 1422)

In pre-modern Europe, wife-assault was not considered a crime by most legal codes and thus cases of this nature rarely appeared before the courts. It was only in instances of severe abuse, usually leading to the murder of the wife by her husband, that this crime was brought before a secular judge.¹ While ecclesiastical courts did provide abused wives an outlet to escape their violent husbands through legal separation due to marital cruelty², such rulings did not necessarily provide wives with adequate protection from further assault.

In late medieval Valencia, the court of the governor, the highest court in the kingdom, provided a wife seeking protection from her abusive husband with the option of a legal restraining order, preventing him from perpetrating further assaults on her body by bringing the wife under the court's own protection. In order to successfully prove her need for such a legal measure from the courts, an abused wife had to demonstrate the severity of violence committed by her husband because, according to late medieval legal and social norms, a husband had the right to beat his wife in order to ensure her good behaviour. To do so, the wife turned to her community networks for support. The following case details a petition brought by Gostança de Mur in 1422 against her husband, Dalmau de Mur, a tailor asking for protection from the courts due to Dalmau's abuse.³

In the year of the Lord 1422, Saturday August 5th, before the honorable Vidal de Blanes, noble and castellan of the most high King and governor of Valencia. En Joan Crespo, notary in the below case produces what follows.

For the information of the court, Joan Crespo, notary and procurator for dona Gostança, wife of en Dalmau de Mur presents and states the following charges against Dalmau.

First, it is said and affirmed that couple lived in the place of Moncada and Dalmau de Mur cruelly and beyond any manner of castigation and without any just cause hit Gostança hard and with excessive force. He then left her for dead and fled this place because the justice sought to seize him. And this is true and well known.

In addition, in the present city [Valencia] Dalmau maliciously many and diverse times, lacking any reason or merited cause beat Gostança, binding her hands and beating her [so severely] that he left her for dead. And this is true and most well-known amongst the neighbours in the area where they live.

¹ See for example, Trevor Dean, "Domestic Violence in late-medieval Bologna", *Renaissance Studies* 18.4 (2004): 527-543.

² For the early modern period see: Daniela Hacke, *Women, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern Venice*, (Ashgate, 2004); Joanne Ferraro, "The Power to Decide: Battered Wives in Early Modern Venice", *Renaissance Quarterly* 48.3 (1995): 492-512.

³ ARV Governació Litium 2228, m. 13 f. 5 r y v, siguiente m. 16 f. 13r. (August 5, 1422).

And it is said that when Dalmau and Gostaça were staying in the place of Castellon de Plana that Dalmau beat Gostaça with the same cruelty in such a manner that she was left as dead. And that Dalmau fled from this place, going to the village of Artisha because the justice of Castellon wished to seize him. And this is well-known.

Many other and diverse times Dalmau has beaten, wounded and maltreated Gostaça harshly and cruelly, beyond all measure of correction. And this is well-known.

Dalmau, not satisfied with these beatings, has locked Gostaça out of the house, leaving her to cry day and night through the streets, not wishing to welcome her in the house nor to give her that which is necessary for life, as a good husband is to do, and this is true.

Dalmau not content with the above acts has wounded Gostaça in many different places on her body, including her head as in other places on her person. And this is true.

Thus for these reasons, Gostaça is afraid and fears Dalmau and asks you, most honorable governor render punishment and other legal consequences against Dalmau in order to protect Gostaça as she is afraid of Dalmau because of the reasons stated above.

The following testimony of witnesses received before the honorable Vidal de Blanes, governor of the kingdom of Valencia regarding the above claims by the notary Joan Crespo, procurator for dona na Gostaça, wife of en Dalmau de Mur, tailor.

Thursday 13th of August, 1422

Dona na Benvenguda, wife of Nicholau Valldaura who swears on the Holy Gospels to say the truth regarding everything in the following testimony about the claims and reasons stated above. She says that twice this witness was neighbor to the said couple in the city of (f 5v.)Valencia. And while living near these neighbours, the witness heard many times a great cry from Gostaça because of the harm and the beatings that Dalmau gave to Gostaça. And she never knew the reason or cause why [Dalmau] wounded and hit her. And many times this witness gave bread to her [Gostaça] because she was lacking in food. And she heard [Gostaça] say that Dalmau had locked her out and did not wish to give her bread and that [Gostaça] was dying of hunger. It has been about a year, more or less, since these events.

Regarding the 6th claim. She has heard what is contained in this claim many times and by diverse peoples and she has seen it herself.

The same day, Thursday 13th of August, 1422

Na Benvenguda, grandmother of the said na Valldaura, witness who swears etc. Therefore regarding the second and the 6th claims. She says that she was in the house of the said couple and heard sometimes Gostaça cry out...the witness said that the husband, Dalmau, wounded his wife, who is Gostaça. The witness saw the wounds of Gostaça. And this is all she knows.

The same day, Thursday 13th of August, 1422

Dona na Isabel, wife of en Bernat Torns, tanner, living in Valencia. Witness who swears etc. And asked about the second claim concerning the said reasons... And Isabel said about this that she saw many times that Dalmau wounded Gostança... Her husband and children also saw all of these acts together with her. They helped Gostança... This witness has well heard it said that this couple, having lived in other houses and neighbourhoods, that he [Dalmau] wounded her most cruelly and that Gostança denied that he had a reason to because she appeared as a good wife and did not disobey him too much. Dalmau ordered that Gostança should complete certain tasks and those which she did not do resulted in [Gostança] having to appeal to [Dalmau] for food and other such things. But the witness is not certain what these tasks were.

The same day, Thursday 13th of August, 1422

Dona na Francisca, wife of Guillem Mir, citizen of Valencia. Witness who swears etc. And firstly regarding the said claims. It is said that she [the witness] has [heard] through the neighbours of Dalmau and Gostança that she is obedient [to him]. And their neighbours said to her that they had heard many and diverse times how Dalmau wounded and hit and struck Gostança with many great blows so much that sometimes the neighbours on the street spoke to him about it but he did not respond to them. But this witness could not say with what he hit her or if he wounded her with words or with a stick. She heard [Gostança] shout that Dalmau would not give her any bread, nor a drop of drink. Gostança pleaded with the witness that she give her a bit of bread for the love of God. (M 16 f. 13r.) When asked how long it has been since this took place, the witness said about five or six months.

The same day, Thursday 13th August, 1422

Dona na Ursola, wife of Gilabert de Bonech, corredor d'orella. Witness who swears etc.

And asked about the said claims, she said regarding them that in the time that the lord king now reigning was in Valencia, Dalmau and Gostança lived in one of the houses of the husband of the witness et that in that house she saw and knew how Dalmau starved his wife. And how each day he wounded her and she saw that he wounded her most cruelly, striking her with a stick and other things so much so that all of the neighbours were compassionate because they heard and knew the bad life that he had given to her. That once he beat and wounded her severely, and the neighbours did not see or hear from her because of her great fear [of him].

Swears testimony given without hatred or fear or etc.

Tuesday 1st of September, 1422

Bernat Soler, barber, citizen of Valencia. Witness who swears etc. And regarding the said claims, he says that around 2 years ago, the witness treated a wound that Dalmau de Mur made with a knife on the person of Gostança, his wife. Dalmau used a knife on Gostança around the ears because of an argument that happened between them. Dalmau fled the city for a few days after this attack, during which time Gostança came to the witness to be treated. And he saw a number of wounds from blows which she had already had treated that were made by Dalmau on the head of Gostança. Wounds which she showed to the witness, saying that they had been done by Dalmau her husband without much cause and for reasons that did not merit such correction. If that which Gostança told this witness is true, then [BLANK] Dalmau wanted to kill her with hunger and that once the witness was in the couple's house and saw that they did not have any

blankets nor sheets not even a bed on which to sleep. And [the witness] has heard it said that Dalmau is very choleric [bad-tempered] and angry with Gostaça and that he treats her very badly and not as a good husband is supposed to [treat] his wife. The witness has met with Gostaça many times and in examining her, found her sound in reason and free from feminine stupidity. And that is all that this witness knows regarding these charges.

And there is no hatred etc.

[The case ends at this point, although likely continued in later registers. I've been unable to find its conclusion]

Petitions to Emigrate from Spain to the Rio de la Plata (now Uruguay and Argentina)

Allyson M. Poska

From 1778 to 1784, the Spanish Crown sponsored a series of expeditions intended to bring settlers from the peninsula to a series of new outposts on the coast of Patagonia. The monarchy initially intended to settle the establishments with 200 poor Galician families in order to aid the economy in that densely populated and very poor region; however, after Galegos demonstrated little interest in the enterprise, the scheme was opened to poor Asturian and Castilian families as well. In the end, the project far exceeded the quota of 200 families; over the course of 5 years, at least 1921 poor peasants boarded 13 ships for the Rio de la Plata. The passengers included 875 women of all ages. A few single women requested permission to join the expeditions. Their petitions provide insight into single women's decision to engage in transatlantic migration.

Typically, young women pled their cases directly to Astraudi, the interim intendant of La Coruña, who was in charge of the project. The women had usually decided to join their families who had already made the voyage. For instance, when María Gregoria Abad's father, his second wife, and their son left in April 1779 on the *Nuestra Señora del Socorro*, María Gregoria remained on the peninsula in the care of her grandfather. After he died, in June 1782, María Gregoria, now 19 years old, asked to be reunited with her father and stepfamily. The authorities consented and placed her in the care of Manuel Antonio Gándara and his wife for the voyage. Gandara's wife had been too ill after giving birth to leave on an earlier ship, and María Gregoria may have been charged with helping care for their three young children.⁴

Here are some of the single women's petitions:

- 1) Archivo General de Indias, Buenos Aires 412 Fol. 504 (22 abril 1780)

María Josepha Pidal, single age 19, niece of Manuela Pidal who is the wife of Manuel Torre, who enlisted long before now to pass to the Rio de la Plata, originally from Villaviciosa with the required attentiveness explains to Your Lordship, I find myself orphaned of father and mother, who recently died in my company. Seeing myself without her and without siblings, I decided to come to this city [La Coruña] in search of the protection and aid of my aunt, Manuela Pidal, in whose company I find myself the past 18 days. Although I have already presented myself to Your Lordship, I hope that it might serve you to add me to the family of my aunt and uncle Manuel Torre [who have already enlisted for the expeditions] ...

I plead to Your Lordship to take pity on my orphaned and poor state, exposed to the misfortunes and travails of the world, that it would serve you to use your great piety to look out for my comfort and relief ordering that I might be added to the enlistment of my uncle Manuel de Torre to pass along with him to the other side of the Rio de la Plata to help him

⁴ Apolant, *Operativo Patagonia*, 376.

with work and cultivating the land in the new outpost in the Rio de la Plata so as to not thus be ruined... Her petition was approved.

2) AGI BA 414 No. 1310 (3 august 1781)

María Díaz Fernández, single, resident in this city, with the greatest attention, explains to your Lordship, due to the death of her parents, she finds herself orphaned without knowing anyone who might care for her, feed her, or help her in this city, as her brother Juan Díaz along with his wife and family left for the new settlements in America on the previous expedition. .. I hope it might serve you to admit her and add her to the family of Juan Martínez, her neighbor, with the obligation that he bring her to her brother as soon as they arrive at those settlements.... Approved.

3) AGI BA 414 No. 1311 (3 august 1781)

Antonia Mosquera, the daughter of Francisco who enlisted with his wife and family, on 2 October of 78, finding herself put in place for the second expedition, with the greatest veneration explains to Your Lordship that at the time of the embarkation, the speaker [Antonia] was advised by some people to remain in this city where she would be cared for with the requisite comfort from then on to obtain greater benefits with which she complied with the innocence that she has had always had. Now she finds herself undeceived and repentant immediately upon seeing her parents far away and exposed by her state to the ruins that cannot be hidden from the wise knowledge of Your Lordship, for which remedy, in consideration that Juan Martinez, her uncle, is enlisted and ready to leave on the next expedition... she wants to be enlisted along with him... until it might be verified that she was brought to the aforementioned Francisco Mosquera father of the supplicant. ... approved.

Isabel Pelaez had enlisted along with her husband and four children; however, during the long wait at port, her husband died and in November of 1781 her eldest son Felipe, then 18 years old, was seriously ill in the Buen Suceso hospital (he later died). Isabel obtained the necessary medical release from the doctors and asked to be freed from her contract.⁵ Her request was granted and she was given money to return home. However, by April 1782, she had changed her mind.

4) AGI BA 415 No. 138 (30 april 1782)

Ysabel Pelaez, the widow of Francisco Carballal, originally from Villaviciosa,... having come with her husband and four children Her husband and older son died in the Buen Suceso Hospital.... She was granted 20 *pesos duras* and the freedom to retire to her native land... but her son, having gotten better and convalesced entirely, has made the supplicant ready to preserve her family and for this reason, as well as for the continuous help lent to her

⁵ AGI, Buenos Aires 414, no. 50 (21 noviembre 1781); Apolant, *Operativo Patagonia*, 364.

house and offered to her children by their uncles Juan and Antonio Carballal, who have also enlisted, the better opportunity that the supplicant and her children might have in America with the aid of the abovementioned and three uncles of the same children named Juan and Felipe Pelaez, brothers of the supplicant and Josef Carballal brother of her deceased husband. ...She asks to be reinstated... approved