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Decentering the Enlightenment: Crossing Global and Gender Perspectives²

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Abstract:

Global and transnational history and women's and gender history are dynamic historiographical currents that invite more intense cross-fertilization—especially in studies on the Enlightenment and its open legacy. Our article seeks to stimulate theoretical and methodological discussion on how these approaches might fruitfully interact. What can a gender perspective add

to current perspectives on a global Enlightenment? And vice-versa, what do transnational and global perspectives that are interested in cultural transfers and sensitive to empire, race, and ethnicity add to current studies on gender and the Enlightenment? Building on the experience and ongoing research of our collective project *CIRGEN: Circulating Gender in the Global Enlightenment: Ideas, Networks, Agencies*, we aim to further efforts to

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decenter the Enlightenment in its multiple senses in relation to geographies, actors, and gazes.

Key words:

Global history, transnational history, gender history, women's history, Enlightenment

Resum:

La història global i transnacional, i la història de les dones i de gènere són corrents historiogràfics dinàmics que conviden a una més intens intercanvi d'idees - especialment en els estudis sobre la Il·lustració i els seus llegats oberts. El nostre article pretén estimular els debats teòrics i metodològics sobre com aquestes aproximacions poden interactuar de forma fructífera. Què pot aportar una perspectiva

de gènere a les perspectives actuals sobre la Il·lustració global? I viceversa, com contribueixen les perspectives globals i transnacionals interessades en les transferències culturals, conscients de l'imperi, la raça, i l'ètnicitat, als estudis actuals sobre gènere i la Il·lustració? Construït sobre l'experiència i la investigació en curs del nostre projecte col·lectiu CIRGEN: *Circulating Gender in the Global Enlightenment: Ideas, Networks, Agencies*, tenim l'objectiu de centrar els esforços a descentrar la Il·lustració en els seus múltiples sentits en relació amb les geografies, actors i mirades.

Paraules clau:

Història global, història transnacional, història de gènere, història de les dones, Il·lustració

Introduction

Global and transnational history and women's and gender history have often followed parallel trajectories, and although they have sometimes intersected and cross-fertilized each other, they have not interacted sufficiently. It can be said that more efforts have been made recently in gender historiography to adopt global and transnational perspectives than vice versa. Global history has been hardly sensitive to gender issues, something already pointed out by Giulia Calvi, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, and Natalie Zemon Davis among others.³ However, there would be considerable benefits to further intertwining gender and global perspectives—two “experimental historiographies (*“storiografie sperimentali”*) or “two lenses used largely to revision history in the last several decades” in words of Calvi and Wiesner-Hanks, respectively. And particularly so if research were to build on the strength of many subfields, as Wiesner-Hanks has highlighted: “the tradition of collaborative and collective work in radical and feminist history; the emphasis on interaction, exchange, and connection from world history; the focus on the agency of everyday people from the ‘old’ new social history; the attention to hegemony, hierarchy, and essentialism from queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory; the stress on difference and on intersections between multiple categories of analysis from women's history.”⁴

³ Giulia Calvi, “Global Trends: Gender Studies in Europe and the US,” *European History Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2010): 641–655; Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “World History and the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality,” *Journal of World History* 18, no. 1 (2007),

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jwh/18.1/wiesnerhanks.html>; Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “Women's History and World History Courses,” *Radical History Review* 91 (Winter 2005): 133–150; and Natalie Zemon Davis, “Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World,” *History and Theory, Studies in the Philosophy of History* 50, no. 2 (2011): 188–202. See also Marilyn Lake, “Nationalist Historiography, Feminist Scholarship, and the Promise and Problems of New Transnational Histories: The Australian Case,” *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 180–186; Judith P. Zinsser, “And Now for Something Completely Different: Gendering the World History Survey,” in *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion*, ed. Ross E. Dunn (Boston: Bedford, 1999), 476–478; Judith P. Zinsser, “Women's History, World History, and the Construction of New Narratives,” *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 196–206; Bonnie Smith, “Introduction,” in *Women's History in Global Perspective*, vol. 1, ed. Bonnie Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 1–8; and Margaret Strobel and Majorie Bingham, “The Theory and Practice of Women's History and Gender History in Global Perspective,” in Smith, *Women's History in Global Perspective*, 9–47.

⁴ Giulia Calvi, “Storiografie sperimentali: genere e world history,” *Storica*, 43–44–45 (2009), 393–432. See also Wiesner-Hanks, “World History and the History of Women, Gender, and Sexuality.”

In this paper, we seek to stimulate theoretical and methodological discussion on how these two approaches can fruitfully interact in the context of Enlightenment studies. What can a gender perspective add to current perspectives on a global Enlightenment? What do transnational perspectives that are interested in cultural circulations and mediations and sensitive to empire, race, and ethnicity add to current studies on gender and the Enlightenment? And crucially: how can this be done from perspectives that avoid the implicit Anglocentrism of many global histories? We will first briefly discuss three approaches combining these two perspectives and then show how we use these methodologies in our project *CIRGEN: Circulating Gender in the Global Enlightenment: Ideas, Networks, Agencies*. Our aim is to advance current efforts to decenter the Enlightenment in the sense expressed by Natalie Zemon Davis: “a history decentered, but yet held together in a globalized world.”⁵ We believe that the unavoidable challenge of globality should be met by striving to write history from a local approach without losing sight of globality, or as Lissa Roberts put it, a history that deals with “globally situated interchanges.”⁶

We are aware of the long road travelled by transnational and global history in its efforts to overcome narrowly national and Eurocentric perspectives that call for the “provincialization of European history.”⁷ The intense debates about aims, methods, and sources, have helped to refine these approaches at least in four important ways. Firstly, by combining perspectives that interweave the local, the national, and the global as appropriate, as well as scales of analysis that bind together general and detail-oriented perspectives. The aim is to produce a type of history in which the individual subject does not evaporate—once again—in favour of collective and ultimately abstract entities such as empires, international trading companies, and religious missionary orders; concepts such as the economy, the markets; and analytical categories such as gender, class, or race. This concern has been expressed above all by historians of women convinced of the theoretical fecundity and heuristic value offered by the analysis of individual lives and the need to rethink the relationship between individuals and societies in an

⁵ Davis, “Decentering History,” 190.

⁶ Lissa Roberts, “Situating Science in Global History: Local Exchanges and Networks of Circulation,” *Itinerario* 33, no. 1 (2009). See also Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York and London, W.W. Norton and Company, 2014).

⁷ See, for instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000).

increasingly interconnected world.⁸ Nor should the obsession with globality lead us to engage in sterile definitions to set apart what it is “global” and what “transnational” (or for that matter, what is meant by “entangled histories,” “connected histories,” or “histoires croisées”). Rather, we need to recognize that these terms are “malleable,” “contested and entangled as any other borders,” and to examine the co-formation of the global and the local.⁹ In the words of Clare Midgley, Alison Twells, and Julie Carlier, we must focus on “how globe-making or world-making projects were anchored in specific localities, and on exploring the role of local agency in the construction of these multiple globalizations or worlds.”¹⁰

Secondly, global and transnational histories have refined their methods by seeking to bring order to the well-intentioned but sometimes vague aims of studies on cultural hybridity, and by more clearly defining the great variety of aspects they encompass, as Peter Burke has highlighted: objects such as texts, artefacts, practices, and peoples; forms of contact such as syncretism, creolization, accommodation, and appropriation; and disparate historically possible outcomes such as resistance, segregation, circularity, and homogenization.¹¹ Thirdly, they have been sensitive to increasing concerns about the need to avoid overestimating the dimensions of connections and circulations and paying attention to the obstacles to circulation: to things that did not circulate, temporal mismatches, misunderstandings, and conflicts generated in cultural encounters.¹² Also, to the unbalance of power between individuals and

⁸ See for instance articles in the supplement “Global History and Microhistory,” *Past and Present*, vol. 242, supplement_14 (Nov. 2019), in particular, Jan de Vries, “Playing with Scales: The Global and the Micro, the Macro and the Nano,” 23–36; and Christian G. de Vito, “History without Scale: The Micro-Spatial Perspective,” 348–372; https://academic.oup.com/past/issue/242/Supplement_14. See also Francesca Trivellato, “Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?” *California Italian Studies*, 2(1) (2011). Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq> (consulted 5/09/2022).

⁹ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “World History”; Bartolomé Yun, “‘Localism,’ Global History and Transnational History: A Reflection from the Historian of Early Modern Europe,” *Historisk Tidskrift*, 127, no. 4 (2007): 659–678, here 660; see also his *Historia global, historia nacional e historia de los imperios: El Atlántico, América y Europa (siglos XVI-XVIII)* (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2019), and “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 5 (December 2006): 1441–1464; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Connected History: Essays and Arguments* (London: Verso, 2022).

¹⁰ Clare Midgley, Alison Twells and Julie Carlier, *Women in Transnational History: Connecting the Local and the Global* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 4.

¹¹ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (London: Polity Press, 2009).

¹² Jeremy Adelman, “What is Global History Now?,” *Aeon*, March 2, 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Question of Hu* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); James A. Secord, ‘Knowledge in Transit,’ *Isis* 95, no. 4 (December 2004): 654–72; Mary Terral and Kapil Raj, “Introduction: Circulation and Locality in Early Modern Science,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 43, no. 4 (2010); Johan Östling et al., eds., *Circulation of Knowledge: Explorations in the History of*

collectives engaged in these processes: men and women, slaves and free people, colonizers, natives and go-betweens; experts and lay publics, among others. And finally, there has been an increasing awareness of the overwhelmingly Anglocentric bias that global and transatlantic histories have often adopted, even more markedly so in studies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than in those about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which Iberian and Latin American historiography has managed to draw historiographical attention to what is often called the “first globalization”.¹³

All these healthily critical approaches have contributed to a global history that is increasingly sophisticated in its analysis. It remains, however, a history that is relatively closed to the question of gender, which has at least made a mark in some research themes, particularly in studies of slavery and the slave trade, of migrations, of sexual contacts during explorations and colorizations, and more recently also of the role of women in contact zones such as African, American and European ports.¹⁴ And yet, Enlightenment studies – open in the last decades to critical perspectives from feminist, postcolonial, and Foucaultian angles- not only allow, but require in a particularly pressing way, the crossing of global and gendered approaches.¹⁵ Our

Knowledge (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2018); Bernard Lightman, Gordon McOuat, and Larry Stewart, eds., *The Circulation of Knowledge between Britain, India, and China: The Early-Modern World to the Twentieth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

¹³ See, for instance, Juan Pimentel and José Pardo-Tomás, “And Yet, We Were Modern: The Paradoxes of Iberian Science after the Grand Narratives,” *History of Science* 55, no. 2 (June 2017): 133–47; Bianca Premo, “On Currents and Comparisons: Gender and the Atlantic ‘Turn’ in Spanish America,” *History Compass* 8, no. 3 (2010): 223–237; Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy and Carmen Salazar-Soler, eds., *Passeurs, mediadores culturales y agentes de la primera globalización en el mundo ibérico, siglos XVI-XIX* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Instituto Riva-Agüero : Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2005).

¹⁴ Mary Louise Roberts, “The Transnationalization of Gender History,” *History and Theory* 44 (2005): 456–468. Angelika Epple, “Storia globale e storia di genere: un rapporto promettente,” *Geschichte und Region/Storia e regione* 21, no. 1–2 (2012): 43–57; Douglas Catterall and Jodi Campbell, eds., *Women in Port: Gendering Communities, Economies, and Social Networks in Atlantic Port Cities, 1500–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians. Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Jennifer Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021); Allyson Poska, *Gendered Crossings: Women and Migration in the Spanish Empire* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press: 2016). Ana Ruiz Gutiérrez, *Lo que fue de ellas: mujeres protagonistas en la ruta transpacífica del Galeón de Manila. Siglos XVI-XIX* (Salobreña-Granada: Editorial Alhulia, 2018); María Elena Martínez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Among a vast bibliography of critical visions of Enlightenment, see Ludmila Jordanova and Peter Hulme, eds., *The Enlightenment and its Shadows* (London: Routledge, 1990); Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment* (Berkeley: Berkeley University Press, 2001); Jacques Donzelot, *La police des familles* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit,

questions are aligned with historiographic developments, stimulated by postcolonial approaches and recently synthesized by Joseph Conrad, that highlight how globalization was co-constitutive of the gaze and scope of Enlightenment.¹⁶

The Enlightenment, understood in all its local and ideological diversity, arose to a great extent in response to growing transnational contacts and actors' awareness of living in a world of increasing integration, a "reaction to the broadening of European horizons" in Conrad's words.¹⁷ Reflection on human nature owes much to maritime expeditions, ethnography, and slavery, as well as to observations on cultural differences within Europe.¹⁸ More specifically, as Sylvana Tomaselli put it back in 1991 in an insightful essay that inspired a rich line of research, women were identified with the historical transition from savagery to civilization, in the double sense that they benefited from this transition while also playing a key civilizing role, potentially universal but considered to have reached its peak only in Europe.¹⁹ That is, the civility of a country was judged by its treatment of women: gender was thus a crucial component for efforts in philosophy, political theory, ethnographic descriptions, history, and in the more daily practice of travel writing to understand cultural differences and categorize them according to states of civilization. In addition, scholarship has recognized the global protracted legacy of the Enlightenment, understood as a concept invoked by different actors,

1977). A recent reappraisal, in Anthony Padgen *The Enlightenment: And why it still matters* (New York: Random House, 2013). We have dealt with these issues in Mónica Bolufer, "De la historia de las ideas a la de las prácticas culturales," in Josep Lluís Barona, Javier Moscoso and Juan Pimentel, eds., *La Ilustración y las ciencias. Para una historia de la objetividad*, (Valencia: Universitat de València, 2003), 21-52, and Bolufer, "The Enlightenment in Spain: Classic and New Historiographical Perspectives," in Elizabeth Franklin Lewis, Mónica Bolufer Peruga and Catherine M. Jaffe, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Hispanic Enlightenment* (London, Routledge: 2020), 3-16.

¹⁶ Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel, *An Emerging Modern World, 1750–1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), particularly the chapter authored by Conrad, "The Global History of the Enlightenment," 485–526. See, for instance, Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995); Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa, eds., *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Charles W. J. Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007); John Brewer and Silvia Sebastiani, eds. "Forum: Closeness and Distance in the Age of Enlightenment," special issue of *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 3 (2014): 603–718.

¹⁷ Conrad and Osterhammel, *An Emerging Modern World*, 494.

¹⁸ Jean-Frédéric Schaub and Silvia Sebastiani, *Race et histoire dans les sociétés occidentales (XVe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2021).

¹⁹ Sylvana Tomaselli, "Reflections on the History of the Science of Woman," *History of Science* 29, no. 2 (1991): 185–205; Silvia Sebastiani, *I limiti del progresso: Razza e genere nell'Illuminismo scozzese* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), and *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013).

as a point of reference for intellectuals and political elites well into the nineteenth century, especially in Asia, as well as in the liberal revolutions of Latin American colonies.²⁰

Crossing Global History and Women's and Gender History in the Enlightenment

In our view, three approaches are particularly interesting in recent studies from transnational/global *and* gender perspectives. They have opened promising venues for expanding our understanding of the Enlightenment, although most of them tend to focus on the British or French world and comparatively neglect Southern Europe and the Hispanic empire.

The first group of such approaches are those dealing with women as cultural mediators and active members of networks and communities, both real and imagined. After a long scholarly tradition built along national lines and considering only male actors, scholarship today has begun to consider women's contribution to the so-called Republic of Letters from a transnational perspective, working in collaborative projects such as COST Action *Women Writers in History* and HERA project *Travelling Texts*.²¹ However, the focus has been above all on how female authors were received abroad or situated themselves in transnational networks, with some attention paid to other roles such as those of *salonnière*, patron, and scientific collaborators. And here, there has been a particular emphasis on French and British cases, with a secondary presence of Italian, Dutch, German, and North American ones and only very limited attention paid to the Hispanic world, both peninsular and colonial.²² The same is true, to some extent, of the circulation of Enlightenment debates on gender: research on the transnational dimensions of the *querelle des femmes* has concentrated on the dissemination of

²⁰ Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 999–1027. Victor Peralta Ruiz, "Ilustración y lenguaje político en la crisis del Mundo Hispánico," *Nuevo mundo, mundos nuevos* 7 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.3517>.

²¹ https://www.cost.eu/women_researchers_hera_erc_grants/; <https://travellingtexts.huygens.knaw.nl/>.

²² Some examples: Gillian Dow, ed., *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators: Women Writers, 1700–1900* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007); Guyonne Leduc, ed., *Les rôles transfrontaliers joués par les femmes dans la construction de l'Europe* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012); Pamela L. Cheek, *Heroines and Local Girls: The Transnational Emergence of Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Carl Thompson, "Women Travellers, Romantic-Era Science and the Banksian Empire," *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 73, no. 4 (December, 2019): 431–55.

French thought to other languages and cultures and on the international and transatlantic connections of British feminism.²³

Another stimulating approach is to focus on global and transnational biographies of people and things. On the one hand, analyzing individual lives in global contexts can help to bridge the gulf between the “micro” approaches common in social and cultural history and more global perspectives. Increased interest in the cosmopolitan dimensions of the Enlightenment has brought a strong fascination with what Jan de Vries has ironically called UCIs (“Unusually Cosmopolitan Individuals”).²⁴ That is, those historical actors who led highly mobile lives, crossing geographical, cultural, religious, linguistic, and political boundaries, leaving behind textual traces of their experiences. The result is that “global biographies,” as they are often called, are with few exceptions those of men: explorers, travellers, brokers, and agents of empire.²⁵ Only occasionally do women appear as protagonists—Elizabeth Marsh, for example, whom Linda Colley examines to argue how the experience of an increasingly interconnected world was also open to women, or other women travellers, particularly as they have been studied in the British empire.²⁶ A more inclusive approach is thus to understand mobility in a broader sense that also encompasses people who, whether they travelled or not, managed to self-fashion and expand their personal horizons, as well as those of their times, and who made unconventional choices within the context of gender norms, by imagining different worlds through their readings, conversations, and experiences.²⁷ Moreover, scholars have shown how

²³ Armel Dubois-Nayt, Marie-Elisabeth Henneau, and Rotraud von Kulesa, eds., *Revisiter la Querelle des femmes, vol. 4: Discours sur l'égalité/inégalité des sexes, de la Renaissance aux lendemains de la Révolution française* (Saint-Etienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2016).

²⁴ De Vries, “Playing with Scales.”

²⁵ Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj, James Delbourgo, *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770–1820* (Sagamore Beach: Science History publ., 2009); O’Phelan and Salazar-Soler, *Passeurs, mediadores culturales y agentes*; Anacleto Pons, “De los detalles al todo: historia cultural y biografías globales,” *História da historiografia* 6, no. 12 (2013): 156-175; Brian Cossart, “Global Lives: Writing Global History with a Biographical Approach,” *Entremons: UPF Journal of World History* 5 (2013): 1–14.

²⁶ Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007); Sutapa Dutta, ed., *British Women Travellers: Empire and Beyond, 1770–1870* (New York and London, Routledge, 2019); Katrina O’Loughlin, *Women, Writing, and Travel in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Rebecca Rogers and Françoise Thébaud, eds., “Voyageuses,” special issue of *Clio: Histoires, femmes, sociétés* 38 (2008); Misty Krueger, ed., *Transatlantic Women Travelers, 1688–1843* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

²⁷ On symbolic cosmopolitanism, see for instance Isabel Burdiel, “Monstrous Sensibilities and Global Readings of Mary W. Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. A Southern Gaze,” in CIRGEN Conference, *Gender, Modernities and the Global Enlightenment*: <https://cirgen.eu/conference/>

one could engage with the broader world without traveling. In her study of the Johnstone family, for instance, Emily Rotschild has shown how women whose lives were not so ostensibly mobile as those of their brothers managed—through their readings, correspondence, and networks—to forge (gendered) images of a wider world, and how their lives closely intertwined with the workings of the British empire and with global politics and trade.²⁸

At the same time, scholars have also focused on the multiple lives of objects that circulated via global mercantile and scientific routes as a way to understand the dynamics of globalization and, in particular, how objects, transformed as they circulated, were instrumental in creating new subjectivities and representations of gender. Furthermore, the focus on objects allows us to recover a “sensory history” and its role in defining gender identities and sexualities that can offer a counterweight to intellectual history, whose predominance in scholarship is often overwhelming. Things showcased power transactions, defined epistemic communities, and touched upon users’ emotions, dynamically transforming users’ gendered identities and their environments. Commenting on the essays collected in *The Global Lives of Things*, which traces the itineraries of precious objects such as Brazilian bird feathers to Europe, red coral from the Mediterranean Sea to China, and shagreen (waterproof leather made of shark and rayskin) from Japan to Europe, Paula Findlen observes that their stories could be considered “material microhistories”, in the sense that one can “make each case study contribute something specific to the larger task of defining the nature of early modern globalization.”²⁹ These material microhistories could be studied from a gender perspective. Anna Maerker has illustrated for instance the changing gender meanings that the papier-mâché anatomical models of pregnant women created in Normandy by Louis Thomas Jérôme Auzoux (1797-1880) underwent when they were imported to the new Egyptian midwifery school for the education of women midwives and to North America to be used in itinerant lectures for women’s sexual education.

²⁸ Emma Rotschild, *The Inner Life of Empires. An Eighteenth-Century History* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁹ Paula Findlen, “Afterword: How (early modern) Things Travel,” in Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds), *The Global Lives of Things: The Material Culture of Connection in the Early Modern World* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 241-247, 244 and 245. See also: Anita Guerrini, “The Material Turn in the History of Life Science,” *Literature Compass* 13, no. 7 (2016): 469–480; Adriana Craciun and Simon Schaffer, eds. *The Material Cultures of Enlightenment Arts and Sciences* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016); Bethany Aram and Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, *Global Goods in the Spanish Empire, 1492–1824: Circulation, Resistance, and Diversity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Rather than simple articulate gender stereotypes, these models could subvert gender roles and hierarchies through use. Anatomical models as well as other objects are not isolated entities or have fixed cultural meanings; on the contrary, they form part of dense webs that include people, techniques, and values: they formed “sociomaterial” networks that dynamically interact. Historians can thus tackle historical changes as consequence of these sociomaterial interactions.³⁰

Finally, a third promising approach in our view is to focus on cultural encounters in contact zones. Coined by Mary Pratt, the term “contact zone” denotes “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.”³¹ In addition to studying how such oppressive forces worked in the building of colonial empires, biopolitics, patriarchal ideologies, and commercial capitalism, scholarship today is also interested in highlighting the negotiations, transformations of identities, complexities, and details of the encounter on both sides.³² In Roberts’ words, this scholarship aims to analyze how power and hierarchies were “temporarily suspended or modified in favour of more local economies of dependence and interest.”³³ Roberts encourages historians to recover the “locally based diversification” in ways that highlight the creative appropriation of ideas and things and its potential circulation in global contexts. Furthermore, focusing on encounters allows us to better explore how the global was forged through “formative interactions” between local exchanges.³⁴

³⁰ Anna Maerker “Papier -Mâché Anatomical Models: The Making of Reform and Empire in Nineteenth-century France and Beyond” in Carla Bittel, Elaine Leong and Christine von Oertzen, *Working with Paper. Gendered Practices in the History of Knowledge* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 177-192. On material culture and gender, see the recent discussion in Heidi Strobel & Jennifer Germann eds. *Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³¹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 6.

³² See, for instance, Zeb Tortorici, *Sexuality and the Unnatural in Colonial Latin America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016); Londa Schiebinger, *Secret Cures of Slaves: People, Plant, and Medicine in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Martha Few “Circulating Smallpox Knowledge: Guatemala Doctors, Maya Indians and Designing Spain’s Smallpox Vaccination Expedition, 1780- 1803,” *British Journal for the History of Science*, 43, no. 4 (2010): 519–537.

³³ Roberts, “Situating Science,” 21.

³⁴ Juan Pimentel and José Pardo-Tomás, “And Yet, We Were Modern: The Paradoxes of Iberian Science after the Grand Narratives,” *History of Science* 55, no. 2 (June 2017): 133–147, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0073275316684353>.

In our current project, CIRGEN, we have used the theoretical and methodological approaches described above as inspirations for our own research, as motives for productive discussions that we have promoted through academic meetings, and as incentives to address important lacunae in current scholarship.

CIRGEN: *Circulating Gender in the Global Enlightenment*

CIRGEN (*Circulating Gender in the Global Enlightenment: Ideas, Networks and Agencies*) is an ERC-funded project based at the Universitat de València (Spain) and carried out by a team of scholars specializing in diverse fields (gender history, political and cultural history, and the history of science and religion, www.cirgen.eu). Launched in 2019, it has promoted collaborative networks across Europe and the Americas, including specialists in intellectual history, literary criticism, translation studies, and the history of science and art. CIRGEN interrogates transnational and global historical phenomena from the angle of gender and from the standpoint of Southern Europe and Latin America. We want to contribute a fresh perspective to the growing interest in the transnational dimensions of women's cultural agency and of the gender debates during the Enlightenment, which we consider not a doctrinal ensemble, but as a set of cultural practices with pragmatic, embodied dimensions, displayed by socially and spatially situated actors. To achieve these aims, CIRGEN has built up a wider intellectual community through its website and social networks, hosting visiting researchers, mentoring early career scholars, and organizing intellectual encounters. It has collaborated regularly with international initiatives and run a series of seminars on different topics including global and transnational history, translation, women's cultural mediation and intellectual authority, sensibility (such as maternal experience), and the art of amorous matching.³⁵ It has also organized a one-day conference on gender and nation-building in Italy and Spain (October

³⁵ See, for instance, the project "Pathologies of Solitude" at <https://wellcome.org/grant-funding/people-and-projects/grants-awarded/pathologies-solitude-eighteenth%E2%80%931st-century> and the new SIHEX (Sociedad Iberoamericana de Historia de las Emociones y la Experiencia).

2020) and, as a central event, the three-day conference “Gender, Modernities, and the Global Enlightenment.”³⁶

Knitting together a perspective focused on gender and on Southern (particularly Hispanic) Europe is necessary not only because this combined approach has seldom been taken, but also because eighteenth-century Spain held a unique place in the eighteenth century, different from that of other Southern European territories such as Italy and Portugal, and also from other European colonial empires such as Britain and France. It was both a powerful global empire and a country whose modernity was questioned from Western European positions (mainly British and French) on the grounds of political “despotism,” colonial cruelty, and religious bigotry—all of them heavily gendered accusations. It thus functioned as a mirror revealing a deformed picture of what Enlightenment should be.³⁷ At the same time, the Spanish world hosted fierce internal debates between metropolitan and creole readings of the Native heritage and of the past and present of the empire.³⁸ Blending these two perspectives together thus enriches our understanding of how modernity itself was defined, how plural it could be, and to what epistemological, historical, and methodological implications that plurality gives rise.

Some of the questions we ask in our project are: In what ways did women participate and contribute to the growing awareness of an interconnected world, which became more acute especially from the eighteenth century onwards? How and within what limits did women contribute to the circulation of ideas, practices, and objects, bringing cultures into contact with each other? Is it possible to consider “cosmopolitanism,” both in its meaning as an aspiration and as a set of practices, in more complex terms than a notion that opposes people who move physically, most often men, to others who did not? We approach these research questions with some of the theoretical and methodological considerations outlined above in mind, as we shall explain below.

³⁶ “Southern Passions: Narrating Nation and Gender (18th–19th Centuries),” details available at <https://cirgen.eu/timeline/conference-southern-passions-narrating-nation-and-gender-eighteenth-nineteenth-centuries-valencia-spain-read-more/>.

³⁷ Elizabeth F. Lewis, Mónica Bolufer, and Catherine M. Jaffe, eds., *The Routledge Companion to the Hispanic Enlightenment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

³⁸ Jorge Cañizares Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Historiographies, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Cultural Mediation and the Building of Networks and Communities

By bringing together studies that look at the crucial roles of women and gender during the Enlightenment and those that pay attention to travel, correspondence networks, and circulation of books, periodicals, and objects, we have challenged customary visions of (male) Enlightened cosmopolitanism and advanced historiographical discussions that stress the multipolar, gendered nature of networks and that question traditional divisions of the cultural landscape of the Enlightenment into “centers” and “peripheries.” Particularly, we have asked ourselves and the scholars with whom we have discussed and collaborated how women related to existing learned and scientific communities while building those of their own; how female travellers, writers, and translators negotiated their place in male arenas; what the transnational dimensions of debates on gender were (for example, on women’s admission to Patriotic Societies); and how the exhibition of “female prodigies” across Europe (and more specifically in Italy, Spain, and Portugal) gave learned women an ambiguous iconic role.³⁹

In relation to learned and scientific networks, we devoted a specific seminar (held in November 2020, in collaboration with University College London and King’s College) to reflecting on women’s participation. The resulting special issue of seven contributions, *Enlightened Female Networks: Gendered Ways of Producing Knowledge*, addresses women’s scholarly and scientific activities at the scale of the circle, community, and network, exploring in a novel way how these female or mixed communities were created and maintained.⁴⁰ We seek to understand the contexts in which these networks operated, how they related to existing scientific communities, and how they generated new ones. We analyze the definitions of acceptable topics and practices, and the preconditions for these communities to engage in science; how they fostered new female identities and roles; and how also they demarcated masculine domains in science. An essay for this issue written by two members of our team explores the biographies of two gentlewomen, María de Betancourt (1758–1824) and Joana de Vigo (1779–

³⁹ Mónica Bolufer, “Women in Patriotic Societies: A Spanish Debate in a European Context,” in *Society Women and Enlightened Charity in Spain: The Junta de Damas de Honor y Mérito, 1787–1823*, ed. Catherine M. Jaffe and Elisa Martín-Valdepeñas Yagüe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2022), 19–36, and Mónica Bolufer, “Knowledge on Display: Aristocratic Sociability, Female Learning, and Enlightenment Pedagogies in Eighteenth-Century Spain and Italy,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 51 (2022) (forthcoming).

⁴⁰ Anna Maerker, Elena Serrano, and Simon Werrett, “Introduction. Enlightened Female Networks: Gendered Ways of Producing Knowledge (1720–1830)”. Published online 03 August 2022. Ahead of Print. *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2021.0072>.

1855), who lived in the Canary and the Balearic Islands respectively, which were crucial nodes of international trade and scientific and naval networks. We mapped some of their scientific and literary contributions, paying particular attention to how they became an active part of transnational learned networks through their friends and kin. We showed how these women made use of the cultural resources at their disposal and capitalized on family networks to participate in formal institutions, deploy epistolary connections, and build their own, sometimes imaginary, networks.⁴¹

We have approached the range of women's agencies in cultural transfers, rather than using the notion of cosmopolitanism—frequently deployed in Enlightenment studies but in our view too restricted to approaches in intellectual history approaches and elite practices—through the more encompassing concept of cultural mediation. This has allowed us, for example, to dialogue with new diplomatic history in order to look at the role of ambassadors' wives as cultural and political mediators.⁴² For those high ranked women whose families had transnational ramifications, and who possessed a refined education and sophisticated intellectual tastes, this so-called cosmopolitanism was one of the prerogatives of their class. The simple notion of nationality had very little sense, as Vanda Anastácio had pointed out, as they frequently had to leave their native countries to marry and were supposed to adopt their husband's country and culture as their own.⁴³

Our seminar on female cultural mediation in the Iberoamerican world (May 2021), resulting in another special issue, analyzed cultural mediation in the Iberian world from these perspectives.⁴⁴ We reconsidered traditional sites of cultural transfer, such as embassies,

⁴¹ Mónica Bolufer and Elena Serrano, "Maritime Crossroads: The Knowledge Pursuits of María de Betancourt (Tenerife, 1758–1824) and Joana de Vigo (Menorca, 1779–1855)," in *Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science*. Published online: 17 August 2022. Ahead of print. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2021.0071>

⁴² Carolina Blutrach, "Traveling Together as a Couple: Gender, Diplomacy, and Cultural Mediation: The Countess of Fernán Núñez, Spanish Ambassadors in Lisbon and Paris (1778–1791)," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 52 (forthcoming 2023).

⁴³ Vanda Anastácio, "Portuguese Women in International Context. Was the Marquise of Alorna (1750-1839) Cosmopolitan?" in *Cosmopolitanism in the Portuguese-Speaking World*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt (Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2017), 132–143.

⁴⁴ The seminar was called "Mediación Cultural en femenino: Bibliotecas, Lecturas y Correspondencia en el Mundo Iberoamericano, siglos XVII y XVIII." More information can be found at <https://cirgen.eu/timeline/seminar-mediacion-cultural-en-femenino-bibliotecas-lecturas-y-correspondencia-en-el-mundo-iberoamericano-siglos-xvii-xviii-online-read-more/>.

libraries, travels, and letters, to uncover the roles of women and explore the transnational dimension of their lives through their journeys and transoceanic correspondence. The papers presented showed, for instance, how Spanish, Portuguese, and Creole noblewomen such as the Duchesses of Aveiro and Almodóvar, the Countess of Fernán Núñez, and the women of the Peruvian family Carrillo de Albornoz crossed geographical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries and participated in the transmission of knowledge through epistolary exchange and the hosting of social gatherings. These papers also uncovered women's role in making modern reading publics, not only as readers, but also as *managers* of family libraries, thus problematizing what counts as a "female library."⁴⁵

Global and Transnational Biographies of Peoples and Things

Rather than focusing on actors who have usually been privileged in global histories (merchants, explorers, colonizers, missionaries, scientists, agents of empire; only more recently, native agents), we have shifted the gaze to women crossing borders and oceans, both in real and symbolic ways. At the conceptual level, this requires revising concepts such as "broker," "mediator," and "cosmopolitan." Methodologically, it implies interrogating in more imaginative ways the sources where women's presence is always less conspicuous than that of men.

Our conference "Gender, Modernities, and the Global Enlightenment," held in February 2022 with more than forty speakers, devoted significant time to analyzing physical and virtual journeys taken by women through lands and languages, which will result in an essay-collection (under the working title of *Gender and Cultural Mediation in the Eighteenth Century*). We looked at women's use of multilingualism as a deliberate strategy (in cases such as that of

⁴⁵ Carolina Blutrach and Laura Guinot Ferri, eds., "Agencia y mediación cultural en femenino: bibliotecas, correspondencia y redes transnacionales en los siglos XVII y XVIII," *Arenal: Revista de Historia de la Mujeres* (forthcoming 2023). See also, in the same volume, Laura Guinot Ferri, "Mujeres en el tejido de redes de sociabilidad y la gestión de bibliotecas en el siglo XVIII: el entorno cultural de intelectual de las duquesas de Almodóvar"; Carolina Blutrach, "Libros y vidas que viajan: género y mediación cultural en la biblioteca de los VI condes de Fernán Núñez"; Gabriela Martínez Pérez, "Comunidad familiar y agencia femenina en el Perú virreinal: un acercamiento desde el epistolario de las Carrillo de Albornoz"; Natalia Maillard Álvarez "La VI Duquesa de Aveiro y las misiones católicas: entre cartas y libros." Additionally, Laura Guinot Ferri: "The Keys to the Forbidden Books: The Duchess of Almodóvar and Her Libraries," in *Gender and the Book Trades*, ed. Elise Watson, Jessica Farrell-Jobst, and Nora Epstein (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

Isabelle de Charrière) and at their agency in building their public image as intellectuals in the Republic of Letters via portraits, publications, and word of mouth (Luise Gottsched and Émilie du Châtelet, among others).⁴⁶ We discussed the roles of women in popularizing specialized, scientific knowledge back and forth between Europe and America, both as authors and translators and as the target audiences for writers, printers, and booksellers,⁴⁷ and we investigated the changing ways in which women used translation, particularly in connection with travel writing and nation-building (as shown in the examples of Greek trans-Adriatic Maria Petretini and Italian Bianca Milesi, as well as the German Meta Forkel and the Spanish María Rosa de Gálvez).⁴⁸ Our discussions also emphasized how debates on gender were profoundly transnational, while at the same time locally shaped, in two senses: first, because women and men who contributed to these debates with their writings were often influenced by their transnational experiences, readings, and connections (Mme d'Épinay's life between Paris and Geneva is an illuminating example); and second, because their texts and ideas underwent creative transformations in circulating in diverse local settings, as illustrated by the multiple translations and adaptations of Spanish Benito Jerónimo Feijoo's *Defensa de las mujeres* (Defence of women, 1726) in Europe, colonial Spanish America and Brazil (involving the manifold motivations and agencies of translators, printers, male and female readers and patrons), or by debates on women's education in late eighteenth-century Hispanic-American periodicals such as the *Mercurio Peruano*, *Papel periódico de la Ciudad de Santafé de Bogotá*, *Primicias de la cultura de Quito*, and *Gazeta de México*.⁴⁹ In a revealing contrast, we have explored also some of the dark sides of the Enlightenment. For example, we have looked at the

⁴⁶ The program and abstracts of the conference can be read at <https://cirgen.eu/programme/>. For discussions of multilingualism and for portraits, see, for instance, the papers of Amélie Jaques and Beatrijs Vanacker, "Transnational Women of Intellect: (De)Constructing Gender Stereotypes in Various Voices"; and Lieke van Deinsen, "Female Author Portraits and The Dissemination of a New Imagery of Gendered Intellectual Authority across Enlightenment Europe."

⁴⁷ Laura Beck, "Jurisprudence among Cooking Recipes: Notions of Law in the German, the Italian, the Iberian and the Mexican Contexts"; Susan Dalton, "Mediating the Moral World: Women Popularizing Art and Literature in Early Nineteenth-Century Venice."

⁴⁸ Elias Buchetmann, "Meta Forkel's Politics of Translation"; Elizabeth Franklin Lewis, "Translating Genre and Gender for Madrid Audiences: The Case of María Rosa Gálvez"; Elisavet Papalexopoulou, "Trans-Adriatic Enlightenment: Maria Petretini's Italian Translation of the 'Turkish Embassy Letters'."

⁴⁹ Conference presentations at "Gender, Modernities and the Global Enlightenment": Anthony La Vopa, "A Woman of Two Cities: Louise d'Épinay, Paris, and Geneva"; Mónica Bolufer, "Discussing Gender, Discussing Modernities: The Many Lives of a Spanish Defence of Women in Europe and America"; Susan Carlile, "Spanish Modernity in the British Press, 1740–1760"; Mariselle Meléndez, "Contesting Gender in Eighteenth-Century Spanish American Newspapers."

gendered paradoxes of solitude in an age of sociability, and at the ambiguous meanings of female patriotic engagement (involving contribution with ideals of reform, promotion of useful knowledge, staging of status, and monitoring of low-class women).⁵⁰ We have also examined the tensions between the claims made by some Black individuals to the delicacy of feeling advocated by the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility, and contrasted it the reluctance of white theatrical publics to admit it on the stage, particularly from male characters.⁵¹

The profound class, gender, and racial bias of the sexual standard of amorous freedom in Enlightened and revolutionary circles is yet another of those dark sides. Indeed, challenging commonplace ideas about the private life of great men, we have approached the male protagonists of classic transoceanic stories from a different angle. Mónica Bolufer's essay "A Latin American Casanova?" analyzes the life and writings (particularly the travel diaries) of the Creole cosmopolitan traveler and revolutionary leader Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816), looking at the forms of masculinity he embodied, his relationships with women, the role of gender in his travel narratives, and his vision of women's rights.⁵² Miranda's trajectory across three continents, bridging different political and intellectual traditions, highlights the significance of male feminists whose views on gender politics differed from the Rousseauian ideal dominant in revolutionary circles but also confirms that even "women's friends" were reluctant—often in unconscious ways—to accept political and (above all) moral equality when imagining postrevolutionary worlds. Bolufer's ongoing work on women's correspondence to Miranda will further explore the complexities of male-female intellectual and emotional exchanges across Europe and America through letters and personal objects.

Recently, we have begun to explore an exciting path through the circulation of artefacts and materials: the intermingling history of the senses, the affects, and gender and sexual identities.⁵³

⁵⁰ María Tausiet, "Solitude and Sensibility: Female Identities in the Spanish Enlightenment," *Dieciocho* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 53–74. Elena Serrano, *Ladies of Honor and Progress: Gender, Useful Knowledge and Politics in Enlightened Spain* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2022).

⁵¹ Estela Roselló, *Longings for equality: the French sensibility of Pierre Bailly, "a black man who felt like white". New Orleans, 1794*. Communication presented to Gender, Modernities and the Global Enlightenment" (Valencia 23-25/02/2021); Ester García-Moscardó, "Sensibility on Stage: Gender, Race, and the Modulations of Feeling in Hispanic Drama," in preparation.

⁵² Mónica Bolufer, "A Latin American Casanova? Sex, Gender, Enlightenment and Revolution in the Life and Writings of Francisco de Miranda (1750–1816)," *Gender & History* 34, no. 1 (March 2022): 22–41.

⁵³ See, for instance, our discussions in the special issue "It's a Match!": Hansun Hsiung and Elena Serrano, "Introduction: Epistemologies of the Match," *Isis* 112, no. 4 (December 2021): 760–765.

As scholars have shown, at given time and place, notions of what can be sensed and how it should be sensed both shape and are shaped by experiences of class, gender, sexuality, and race.⁵⁴ In our conference “Gender, Modernities and the Global Enlightenment,” for instance, we discussed the different and ambiguous ways in which the rhetoric of sweetness, increasingly consumed in the form of colonial sugar, shaped models of femininity in the Hispanic Enlightenment, both peninsular and American. We interrogated how people perceived and negotiated gender-based meanings of sugar and sweet taste in the period when sugar was becoming a more affordable commodity.⁵⁵

We further explored these “biographies” of objects and their gendered perception in our seminar “Touching Visions: Gender and the Potency of Visual Artefacts” (January 2021), where we discussed how objects of sight were crafted to touch, and be touched by, souls, minds, and bodies.⁵⁶ Specifically, we proposed an interdisciplinary exploration over a global *longue durée* on how the capacity of visual artefacts to touch and be touched has been shaped by a constant gendering of the physiology and psychology of affect and sensation. Ester García-Moscardó for instance, explored the role played by objects in the Hispanic occupation of Tahiti (1772–1776) in the colonizing project devised by the viceroy of Peru in order to persuade the Tahitians of the benefits of European civilization under the Hispanic rule.⁵⁷ The operation involved the offering of propitiatory gifts, as well as the objectification of the Tahitians by reshaping both their bodies and souls: new clothes, adornments, beliefs, and names were to materially transform the islanders into eloquent *human visual artefacts* that embodied both

⁵⁴ Situated at the intersection of anthropology, art history, media studies, and sociocultural history, the literature on sensory studies is vast. For an initial orientation, see David Howes and Constance Classen *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (London: Routledge, 2014); Michael Bull, Paul Gilroy, David Howes, and Douglas Kahn, “Introducing Sensory Studies,” *The Senses and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 5–7; Olga Sabido, “Sentidos, emociones y artefactos: abordajes relacionales. Introducción,” *Digithum* 25 (January 2020): 1–10; Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Benay Erin E. and Lisa Rafaneli, *Faith, Gender and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art: Interpreting the Noli me tangere and Doubting Thomas* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁵⁵ Conference presentation at “Gender, Modernities and the Global Enlightenment,” Marta Manzaneres Mileo, “Delightful Appetites: Representing Women’s Taste in the Hispanic Enlightenment.”

⁵⁶ On the seminar “Touching Visions: Gender and the Potency of Visual Artefacts,” see

<https://cirgen.eu/timeline/seminar-touching-visions-gender-and-the-potency-of-visual-artefacts-read-more/>.

⁵⁷ Ester García-Moscardó, “The Tahitians of the Viceroy: Imperial Gifts and Human Visual Artefacts in the Late Hispanic Empire.”

civilizing values and the colonizers' assumptions about gender. Natives' own vision and experience of these exchanges is a crucial perspective that we are struggling to recover, albeit in partial and oblique ways, from these colonial sources.

Cultural Encounters in Contact Zones

Our approach to the transnational and global circulation of notions and models of gender does not consider them forms of passive “imitation,” but in the strong sense that reception theory and studies on translation, cultural, and knowledge transfer have developed, that is to say, as implying creative and significant appropriation in cultural encounters. At the same time, we approach “translation” as an important area of survey and as a metaphor for these complex processes of appropriation, both at a collective level and at that of individual strategies. We avoid a radial, egg-yolk, trickle-down model of dissemination from center to periphery (from France to other countries; from Europe to the world; from highbrow to popular culture, and from original work to translation), without adopting a postmodern idea of flowing, amorphous configurations, while taking into consideration the unequal distribution of (cultural) power and the obstacles to circulation and exchange.⁵⁸

The idea of contact zones, understood physically as well as in the sense of a textual “melting pot,” is especially fruitful when we deal with one of the most conspicuous topics during the Enlightenment, “sensibility” and its universe of eighteenth-century meanings. A disputed and ambiguous object, sensibility aimed to explain why objects, subjects, and their representation produced pleasure or pain, excited appetites, and sparked feelings. Sensibility thus related crucially with subjectivities and sexuality—the emotional and physical aspects of sexual desire.⁵⁹ In a collective volume that we are preparing, tentatively titled *Gender and the Emotions: Sensibility, Race, and Sexuality in the Global Enlightenment*, we focus on transcultural encounters in order to be able to address how things, ideas, and people were perceived or “sensed” in different ways as they crossed physical and textual cultural

⁵⁸ See, for instance the essays in Faidra Papanelopoulou, Agustí Nieto-Galan, eds., *Popularizing Science and Technology in the European Periphery, 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁵⁹ A useful introduction can be found in Anne C. Vila, “Introduction: Powers, Pleasures and Perils of the Senses in the Enlightenment Era,” in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Anne C. Vila (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–20.

boundaries. This was the case with the bestseller *Breve storia di Catterina Vizzani* (1774), whose protagonist was born as a woman but publicly lived for much of her life as a man, Giovanni Bordonì. Examining the Italian original with its English and German translations, our collaborator Clorinda Donato aims to elucidate how what we might today call a transgender life story is sensed differently across cultural boundaries, where meaning was produced not only through the text of the novel itself, but also through correspondence networks, anatomical treatises, and criminal trials.⁶⁰ However, we also look at physical encounters, such as the one that took place in 1768 in Matavai Bay (currently Tahiti) between the islanders and the men (and a woman, the naturalist Jeanne Baret, who disguised herself as a man in order to be able to join the crew) of Louis Antoine de Bougainville's expedition, an episode examined by our collaborators Juan Pimentel and Manuel Burón.⁶¹ Considering histories from Tahiti to New Orleans, Madrid to Lima, Río to Venice, and the Philippines to Eastern Europe, we ask how sensibility was brandished by different ethnical, political, and cultural groups to define their identities as with or against others; how cross-cultural and cross-chronological encounters served to reconfigure ideas of gendered selves; how non-heterosexual relations served to empower non-European ethnicities, and how the circulation of local concepts of the body's physiology reinforced or challenged hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity in a global context.

The historiographical construction of the cultural geographies of the Enlightenment and the representation of Southern Europeans as Europe's internal "Others" have also been topics of our interest. Our conference "Southern Passions" (October 2020) looked at the cultural, gendered construction of the South, comparing the connected, yet also intriguingly different cases of Italy and Spain. Our discussions and the resulting book build on research about the complex and conflictive symbolic construction of European borders, "centers," and "peripheries," qualifying the idea of Southern Europe as the internal Other of Western modernity with a perspective that highlights the open nature of these processes, the plurality of conflicting opinions (of women and men; conventional and inquisitive travellers), the internal

⁶⁰ Clorinda Donato, "Translating Transgender in Eighteenth-Century Europe: The Mediatic Ecosystem of Transmission, Reworking, and Circulation of The Brief Story of Catterina Vizzani." CIRGEN conference: <https://cirgen.eu/programme/>

⁶¹ Juan Pimentel (CCHS-CSIC) and Manuel Burón "Hidden or Forbidden. On Female Roles in South Pacific Early Contacts in 1768." CIRGEN conference: <https://cirgen.eu/programme/>

inconsistencies of those images, and the ways they were used by Southern Europeans.⁶² For instance, Northern travellers (French, British, Prussian) and particularly travel collections popularizing clichés associated with “national characters” tended to interpret forms of gallantry in the south as adultery, and therefore as proof of the inability of Southerners to control their passions. However, some more insightful or empathetic observers tried to understand the local logics of social practices different from their own, while natives (Italian, Spaniards) often simultaneously internalized and discussed the association of the North with modernity, for instance defending the civilizing role of Spain in America, or presenting Italian and Spanish forms of gallantry as a moral alternative either to domesticity or to “frivolous” sociability imposed by French hegemony. We try to offer a more nuanced view that highlights differences linked to gender and nation, to social, intellectual, and political positions, and to personal circumstances, paying close attention to the specific temporal, cultural, and political contexts, and to the interplay between external gazes and self-representations.

We have also addressed, in an exploratory way, an almost completely uncharted question, namely the role of gender in the construction of images of Islam in the Hispanic Enlightenment.⁶³ Spain is a distinctive and particularly interesting case within European Orientalism not only because Islam was part of its history and cultural legacy and a close neighbour in the North of Africa, but also because the country was Orientalized by Enlightened travellers and philosophers—though not as intensely as by later Romantics—notably in relation to gender. If the Enlightenment developed a more open vision of Islam, albeit not devoid of stereotypes, our preliminary analysis suggests that in Spain the development of Arabic studies did not produce, as far as gender was concerned, more nuanced visions. Rather, Spanish and creole intellectuals contested the tendency to bracket together Hispanic and the Islamic cultures and highlighted contrasts with the “Orient” to claim a place for Spain in European modernity.

Our work up to now highlights that we not only need to tell entangled histories of Europeans and other people (subjects or not of European colonial empires), but to recover and interrogate the problematic and heterogeneous construction of “Europe” itself. We have done so by

⁶² Xavier Andreu and Mónica Bolufer, eds., *European Modernity and the Passionate South. Gender and Nation in Italy and Spain in the long Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

⁶³ Mónica Bolufer, “A Centuries-Long Enslavement? Gender and Islam in the Hispanic Enlightenment: An Exploratory Approach,” *Diciottesimo Secolo* 7 (2022).

pointing at the involvement of Spain and colonial South America in the world of Enlightenment was contested, as Southern Europe (particularly Italy and Spain) were cast in gendered terms as the reverse of modernity. Our research has also contributed to expand the scope of historical subjects engaged in transnational and/or global processes of knowledge production and transmission, the places from which they operate (domestic and cosmopolitan; at home and abroad; formal and informal...), and the conceptual frameworks through which we understand their contributions and their limits. As we deal with the challenges of combining transnational, global and gender perspectives, other avenues and other subjects seem particularly fruitful for future research. We are beginning to explore the Enlightenment as it was experienced and practiced by ordinary actors, in the sense coined by Bianca Premo to analyze the appropriation of Enlightenment discourses by Indians, free and enslaved Blacks, Mestizos, Creoles in their disputes with each other and with the authorities; we are looking, for instance, at the gendered narratives of Islamic travellers' journeys to Europe - precious counterpoint to European Orientalism, the life in the mixed *beaterios* (houses for religious women) for Spanish, Mestizas and Chinese women in Manila and the gendered uses of remedies for healing the “passions of the soul” among Black people of Perú and Nueva España.⁶⁴

All in all, the work we are doing at CIRGEN, both published and in progress, illustrates the potentials—as well as the difficulties—of a firmly contextualized gender perspective to advance scholarly debate on the paradoxes of gender in the age of Enlightenment, while also taking discussion beyond France and the British Atlantic with a more global approach that embraces the Hispanic world and Southern Europe. Our own contributions and the rich dialogues that we have been able to host with scholars across Europe, the Americas, and beyond confirm how gender perspectives reveal multiple and paradoxical pathways to modernity. Considering the Hispanic case in relation to others problematizes the division between “radical” and “moderate” Enlightenments, highlights the controversial legacy of Enlightenment, and decenters key questions in relation to mobility, cultural mediation, and material experiences of a global world.

⁶⁴ Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (New York, 2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 16 Feb. 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190638726.001.0001>, accessed 5 Aug. 2022.

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