



Towards a Gendered, Decentred History of Cultural Mediation in the Eighteenth Century

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[My] journey has been useful to me. The variety of people and the variety of mores have considerably increased the number of my ideas, and (if I may say this without embarrassment) have corrected many errors of my imagination, to the great profit of my heart.

—Leonor de Almeida Portugal, marquise of Alorna, letter to her sister, 21 June 1780 (in Anastácio 2017, 135)

Geography is an area of study both enjoyable and useful for people of all kinds, since it enables them to discern the size and division of the world from the comfort of their own homes ... It is not enough to know where a place may be – it is far more important to know what is unusual about

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it and how its people's customs may vary from those of other places. This can be learned by reading travel writings that entertain and instruct at the same time.

—Josefa Amar y Borbón (1994 [1790], 182–83)

CROSSING BORDERS: CONCEPTS, ACTORS AND GEOGRAPHIES

With these words, two eighteenth-century women who led very different lives despite being almost exact contemporaries make plain the significant place held by travel and learning about the world in their respective experiences. The former, Leonor de Almeida Portugal (1750–1839), Countess of Oeynhausen and Marquise of Alorna, was born in Lisbon, married a German diplomat and lived abroad most of her life: in Vienna, Madrid and London. The latter, Spanish intellectual Josefa Amar y Borbón (1749–1833), was born in provincial Zaragoza and never ventured out of peninsular Spain, unlike her brother and her son, both of whom served in the Bourbon administration in Spanish America. She was, however, an avid reader and translator of travel narratives, and recommended them to women as pleasurable and useful reading matter that would expand their mental horizons beyond those of their daily lives (Bolufer 2016, 235–37).

In the eighteenth century, European horizons in general were expanding both literally and metaphorically. Improved communications, an intensification of both domestic and long-distance diplomatic, military, cultural and recreational travels, an exponential surge in publications, including increasing numbers of translations and travel narratives, the development of global commerce (and slavery), as well as of transnational and transoceanic networks linking academies, societies and individuals, all of these contributed to a shared feeling of a densely interconnected world. What part did women play in these processes and, more generally, how were the latter shaped according to local, regional and social settings? What restrictions and obstacles remained, and how were these negotiated?

This book helps answer those questions and advance current scholarship in three main ways. Firstly, it gives us a more intricate knowledge of the transnational developments of debates on gender which, in the eighteenth century, often took the form of discussions on female “nature”, education and roles (with men seen either as embodying

universal humanity, or as the implicit opposite against which women were measured). Secondly, it expands our visions of the gendered dimensions of cultural mediation, with an emphasis on the circulation of written culture in different formats and genres (correspondence, travel narratives, novels and short stories, historical and philosophical essays, periodicals, operas and plays), as well as on printed portraits. It pays particular attention to female cultural mediators: women writers, translators, travellers and readers. However, it also considers male agents of mediation (writers, translators, correspondents; secondarily, printers, booksellers, reviewers) with reference to their relations with women or their participation in debates on gender. Finally, it decentres our perspectives on Enlightenment cultural geographies by emphasising cultural transfers within Southern Europe, between Southern Europe and the rest of Europe, and between Europe and the Americas.

Our aim is to bring together two stimulating but thus far relatively discrete strands of eighteenth-century studies. On the one hand, the current focus on processes of circulation and adaptation of ideas, objects and transcultural practices (reading, writing, translation, sociability, travel, correspondence, consumption) has led to an emphasis on the transnational and global dimensions of the Enlightenment (Kontler 2006; Withers 2007; Conrad 2012; Brewer and Sebastiani 2014) and even to its consideration as an “event in the history of mediation” (Siskin and Warner 2010, 1). This line of research, however, has barely touched on questions of gender (Bolufer and Serrano 2022; Sebastiani 2008, 2023). On the other hand, studies on women’s central role in eighteenth-century cultural life as authors, translators, readers and patrons, as well as research into the importance of gender in Enlightenment thought, have genuinely transformed the very interpretation of the Enlightenment (La Vopa 2008), but have until recently developed from primarily national perspectives.¹ Both these strands of eighteenth-century studies have, moreover, tended to omit the South of Europe (Italy, Portugal, Greece) and the Hispanic world (peninsular as well as colonial). While

¹ On women and gender in eighteenth-century France, see among many other studies those of Steinbrügge (1987), Goodman (1994), Hesse (2001), special issue “Femmes et Lumières” (*Dix-huitième siècle*, 2004), Krieff and André (2015). In Britain and Scotland: O’Brien (2009), Sebastiani (2013). In Spain and Spanish America: Bolufer (1998), Jaffe and Lewis (2009). In Italy: Messbarger (2002), Findlen et al. (2009), Brambilla (2013), Brambilla and Jacobson Schutte (2014). In Germany: Bödeker and Steinbrügge (2001).

more research into all these territories from the perspective of gender has accumulated in recent decades, in different languages and to varying extents depending on the territory, it has been insufficiently integrated—other than in the form of singular cases or notable exceptions—into general surveys of the period.

The essay collections *Conceptualising Woman in Enlightenment Thought* (Bödeker and Steinbrügge 2001) and *Women, Gender, and the Enlightenment* (Knott and Taylor 2005) were pioneering attempts at transnational dialogues which, although still favouring France and Britain, did at least gesture towards incorporating other territories (Germany, British America; to a lesser extent Italy, Spain, The Netherlands) so as to offer a broader picture. Subsequent studies of Enlightenment debates on gender have concentrated on translations into other languages of either French or British works.² Approaches that look at intertwined discussions and multiple connections remain infrequent: Anthony La Vopa's fascinating study of personal and intellectual friendships connecting women and men of the French, British and Scottish Enlightenment is a rare accomplishment (La Vopa 2017).

For its part, the incipient but steadily growing scholarship on the transnational dimensions of women's cultural agency has tended to focus on female writers' activities and networks. Women's contributions to the Republic of Letters have only recently begun to be considered from a transnational perspective: in collaborative projects such as COST Action *Women Writers in History* (and the subsequent series published by Brill), and in several book collections and monographs.³ The main focus has been on how female authors (particularly French) were received abroad, with some attention paid to other roles such as those of *salonnière* or patron.⁴ Women's activities as translators during the eighteenth century,

² See, for example, Moran (2005), Lee (2014), Kirkley (2022). Dubois-Nayt et al. (2016), the last of four volumes on the *querelle des femmes* in France (considered the epicentre of the debate) from the fifteenth century to eighteenth century looks at French influence on other countries, with some focus on the role played by works of the sixteenth and seventeenth (but not eighteenth) centuries originally published elsewhere.

³ Fidecaro et al. (2009). See also other collaborative projects such as HERA *Travelling Texts. Circulating Women's Writings on the Fringes of Europe* (<https://travellingtexts.huygens.knaw.nl/>) and EDULUM. *Éducatrices et Lumières: l'exemple de Mme Leprince de Beaumont* (<https://hal.univ-lorraine.fr/EDULUM-UL/>).

⁴ Dow (2007) focuses on literary translation by women or of women's works from French to English or English to French, with one Spanish translation, but no Portuguese,

a subject of growing interest, have been studied above all in relation to literary and scientific translations by or from British and French authors or translators, again with little acknowledgement of research on Spanish, Italian and Portuguese women translators.⁵

Other types of female cultural mediation across frontiers have received substantially less attention than has the work of women writers and translators. Scholarship on women travellers has grown steadily, expanding from what was previously an almost exclusive interest in nineteenth-century women explorers to include earlier and more varied cases. However, with a small number of exceptions, it has tended to concentrate on British women's travel experiences and writings, looking at how they roamed the British empire and beyond, contributing to the construction of "imperial gazes"; or how they participated in the Grand Tour, previously reserved to their male peers (Pratt 1992; Dutta 2019; Brilli and Neri 2020; O'Loughlin 2020; Krueger 2021). The perspectives of women travellers and mediators from other cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds, if still less studied, are more familiar today: for example, women rulers, queen consorts, ladies-in-waiting and female ambassadors crossing dynastic, linguistic and religious borders; or nuns venturing across the Atlantic and the Pacific.⁶ Other dynamic areas of research include women's roles in consumption and collecting practices, the forced migration of female slaves and their cross-cultural roles, and the gendered politics of evangelising missions.⁷ While different from the objectives of

Italian or Latin American translators or authors. Cheek (2019) addresses the emergence of "women's writing" as a transnational category of identity for women of letters in France, Britain, Germany and The Netherlands.

⁵ Essays in Leduc (2012) discuss women translators, mediators, travellers and feminists from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century; those on the eighteenth century deal mostly with French and secondarily with British and Eastern European (notably Russian) cases, with just one Spanish example. On Italian women translators, see Agorni (2014), Bertucci (2013); on Spain, Bolufer (2017), García Garrosa (2022); on Portugal, Bello Vázquez (2013) and Anastácio (2017).

⁶ On mobility and mediations of queens, female aristocrats and diplomats' wives, see Watanabe-O'Kelly and Morton (2016), Palos and Sánchez (2016), Sluga and James (2016), Anastácio (2017), Blutrach (2022, 2023), Guinot-Ferri (2022). On nuns' experiences (better documented for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than for the eighteenth), see Rogers and Thébaud (2008), Owens (2017), and Baranda and Cruz (2018).

⁷ See, for example, Strobel and Germann (2016), Leis and Wills (2021), Morgan (2021), Dorlin (2006).

this volume, these point to a growing interest in the roles of women and gender in diverse forms of cultural mediation, as well as underlining the still patchy advancements of a field of learning that remains far more developed for the British world than for other territories.

Histories of women's reading, including the development of the new commodity of literature "for women", exist in abundance for France and Britain, and to a lesser extent for Italy and the Spanish empire, and for the most part adopt national approaches (Brouard-Arends 2003; Knight et al. 2018; Plebani 2001; Arias de Saavedra Alías 2017; Castañeda et al. 2004). There are hardly any comparative studies covering, for instance, exchanges within Catholic Southern Europe, whose territories are linked by strong cultural ties. Some research has been done into readers' networks and connections bridging the Atlantic, but primarily with regard to Britain and North America (Brayman Hackel and Kelly 2008). This mirrors the general trend in Atlantic history written in English, which has until recently restricted its horizons to the British Atlantic.

The move in Atlantic history towards the south, that is, towards the Spanish and Portuguese world, already perceptible in imperial history and the history of science (Aram and Yun-Casalilla 2014; Yun-Casalilla 2019; Pimentel and Pardo-Tomás 2017), will gain much from incorporating greater attention to gender. For its part, scholarship on women and gender in peninsular Spain and in Hispanic America, to some extent treated in isolation from one another, has just started to read these experiences in parallel and still needs to look more closely at transoceanic transfers (Morant 2005; Jaffe and Lewis 2009; Díaz and Quispe-Agnoli 2018; Lewis et al. 2020). For instance, while more is now known about women's roles in transoceanic migration and family correspondence across the Spanish Atlantic and Pacific than was the case some years ago, much remains to be discovered about, for example, their participation in knowledge circulation and in intellectual, cultural and religious networks, particularly in the late colonial period.⁸

⁸ See, for example, Martínez Pérez (2021), Sánchez Rubio and Testón Núñez (2019), Gutiérrez (2018), Rey (2021), Poska (2016), Premo (2010, 2017). Cruz and Hernández (2011) and Baranda and Cruz (2018) cover sixteenth- and seventeenth-century peninsular Spain and Spanish America; the latter examines the transatlantic circulation of women's travel narratives, hagiographies and spiritual autobiographies in that period; O'Phelan and Salazar-Soler (2005) consider male cross-cultural mediators.

Our book draws on recent calls for further cross-fertilisation between transnational and global approaches and those of women's and gender history, and takes said approaches in new directions, with a particular focus on travel, translation and book circulation.⁹ It explores, on a scale not previously attempted for the eighteenth century, the ways in which notions of gender circulated and were transformed, hybridised and creatively appropriated. In so doing, it contributes to a more inclusive global history which critically interrogates the cultural geographies of the Enlightenment and the symbolic configurations of centres and peripheries, by exploring the relationships and tensions, crucial to modernity, between the local, the "national" and the "cosmopolitan", and considering how those were defined in gendered terms.¹⁰ More particularly, it aims to place Southern Europe and the Hispanic world at the centre of those debates. While the Enlightenment in those territories has unquestionably been marginalised in international (particularly English-speaking) historiography, becoming in Karen Stolley's words "a scholarly blind spot in discussions of the global Enlightenment", it cannot be considered marginal.¹¹ The Enlightenment developed there, as elsewhere, through the creative exchange and active interplay of ideas both received from abroad and locally elaborated (Withers 2007, 37).

This book itself crosses borders at different levels. It establishes dialogues between disciplines, as our authors are experts in different fields, with all their methodological plurality: cultural, intellectual and gender history, philosophy, literary criticism, translation and visual studies. We also move between different national academic traditions. The essays draw

⁹ Wiesner-Hanks (2015) approaches the exchanges of texts and images across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean in a wider chronology, with some essays dealing with the eighteenth century. Campbell and Larsen (2009) is an important collection focusing on women in cross-national communities of letters, ranging from Italy and France to the Low Countries and England.

¹⁰ Theoretical and methodological discussions of the synergies between global and transnational history and women's and gender history include, among others, Calvi (2009) and Wiesner-Hanks (2011); for Enlightenment studies, see Bolufer and Serrano (2022).

¹¹ Stolley (2020, 17). On the specificity of the Hispanic Enlightenment and its exclusion from general surveys of the movement, see Butterwick et al. (2008), Astigarraga (2015), Lewis et al. (2020) (particularly Bolufer 2020 and Stolley 2020), Cañizares-Esguerra (2001), Escamilla (2010). Pagden (2013) mentions just one eighteenth-century Spanish writer, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, but in the preface to the Spanish edition of his book acknowledges the need for the Hispanic Enlightenment to be studied in greater depth.

on a rich, varied and multilingual scholarship that has been brewing in Europe and the Americas in recent decades. References to primary and secondary sources in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, German, Greek (and Latin) are eloquent proof of that diversity. No matter what its geographical span and ambitions, research based exclusively on scholarship produced in a single language can never convincingly claim to be transnational or global. The territories covered embrace Europe and colonial America, with a particular—but not exclusive—emphasis on Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Greece) and the Hispanic empire; although we have not been able to include a specific essay on Portugal and Brazil, both receive attention within these pages. We also touch on other European and non-European spaces inhabited, traversed or reflected upon by the protagonists of our stories (France, Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey).

We are very much aware of the challenges involved in efforts to go beyond the narrow focus of national and often also Eurocentric or parochial histories and instead write global, transnational, Atlantic, intermingled or connected histories (*histoires croisées*) whose interest lies in mobility and circulation (of ideas, objects and people) and in forms of cultural mixing. We are also persuaded of the need for conceptual precision and historical accuracy when speaking of processes of cultural circulation or mixing, and their results in terms of adaptation, hybridity, syncretism or resistance (Wiesner-Hanks 2011, 358; Burke 2009). To conceptualise these processes, we have chosen to use the encompassing notion of mediation in our title. We agree with other scholars that it better captures the active role of a plurality of agents (in our case, writers, translators, reviewers and adaptors, printers, booksellers, correspondents, travellers) in cultural exchanges than do other, more abstract terms such as reception or circulation which, in some uses, seem to imply unilateral movement or passive imitation and reproduction. Also, as has been stressed in recent discussions, this notion helps us move beyond the usual focus on bilateral exchanges between two languages or cultures and visualise “plural and multidirectional forms of transfer both within and between cultures” (Verschaffel et al. 2014, 1259). However, we have chosen not to impose a unitarian conceptual framework on the volume as a whole. Many of our contributors speak of cultural mediation, and of their characters as mediators, while others speak of book circulation, cultural transfers, reception, negotiation and adaptation, or

combine several of these categories in their analyses.¹² Nuances notwithstanding, what matters is that we all consider the processes behind these concepts as forms of creative appropriation, which result in cultural products that are not mere reproductions but hybrids. Knowledge is always transformed as it circulates, and reception (through reading, watching, listening, translating) is never a passive act, nor is it ever homogeneous or entirely predictable.¹³ At the same time, these processes are framed in precise historical contexts and restricted by material and cultural obstacles and limits.

Translation is a crucial concept in this book—our focus on it inspired by the ways in which new understandings of culture and gender have challenged and extended traditional notions of this form of reworking. We approach it both as a specific literary practice—part of a wide range of writing activities (borrowing, rewriting, plagiarism)—and as a metaphor for complex processes of collective and individual adaptation and transfer of ideas, aesthetics and culture (including material culture). It is therefore connected to notions of collaboration, adaptation, negotiation, as well as to travel (the movement of both people and ideas) and transposition. The particular dynamism associated with translation in the eighteenth century—as versions of texts moving from one language to others multiplied and transnational commerce of books flourished—makes it an activity that characterised the cosmopolitan spirit of the Enlightenment. Translation also exemplifies the gendered dimensions of intellectual life, literary production and distribution, reading and the making of audiences/readerships.¹⁴

All those gendered forms of mediation were not only transnational and multilingual, but also crucially connected to local material, social, political and cultural circumstances. We assume that ideas do not circulate in the void, but through personal contacts and material objects. The essays

¹² See, among an abundance of sources: on knowledge or literary circulation (Roberts 2009; Raj 2013; Mulholland 2018); on appropriation (Withers 2007, 36). Comparative discussions of these and other concepts can be found in Johns (2014, 1–2), Burke (2005, 101–8).

¹³ An interesting proposal for addressing knowledge circulation in the eighteenth century from a decentred perspective can be found in Kontler et al. (2014).

¹⁴ On translation in the eighteenth century, see Oz-Salzberger (2006), Stockhorst (2010). An influential classic in translation theory is Bassnett (2014). For more on cultural translation in historical studies, see Burke and Po-chia (2007) and Burke (2005, 103).

included here explore some of the multiple, material channels for cultural transfer—print circulation, travel, translation, correspondence and sociability—and consider a diversity of written and iconographic sources, from travel narratives, novels, philosophical essays, moral and pedagogical works and manuscript letters to engraved portraits. Several of our authors are inspired by the cultural history of the book and also by more recent attention to materiality as a corrective to the sometimes overly text-based approaches influenced by the linguistic turn (Wharton 2018). For example, they consider the physicality of printed materials (formats, qualities, sizes) that point at specific dissemination strategies and target readerships (scholarly, aristocratic, middlebrow, popular).

We understand the Enlightenment, building on an extensive scholarship on its multiple, global, contextualised and material forms, not exclusively or primarily as a doctrinal whole, but as a set of cultural and communication practices which had a pragmatic dimension and were the result of embodied activities, displayed by socially and spatially situated actors.¹⁵ In considering the agency of those actors, we take into account the different positions in configurations of power from which they exerted their mediation. However, we try to qualify clear-cut dichotomies (male/female, metropolitan/colonial, author/translator...) in favour of more nuanced, contextualised approaches. We also consider obstacles to circulation, conflicts generated by mediation, for instance the power of censorship, the social boundaries posed by low literacy levels or diverging language competences, and technical limitations such as the uneven distribution of printing presses. To quote Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “as we examine historical examples of border-crossers and border-transcenders ..., it is equally important to remind ourselves of the continued power of those borders” (Wiesner-Hanks 2011, 378–79).

Chronologically, our book travels from the origins of the Enlightenment in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to the merging of Enlightenment and Romantic threads in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This periodisation is coherent with our perspective seeking to problematise simple dichotomies between modernity and tradition, and the idea of “backwardness” or “retarded” cultural processes, especially applied to Southern Europe and the Hispanic world. A less compartmentalised view of the transitions from Baroque to Enlightenment, and on

¹⁵ Discussions of scholarship on the Enlightenment can be found in Pagden (2013), Bolufer (2003), Outram (1995), Jordanova and Hulme (1990).

again to Romanticism and nationalism, allows us to consider the different timings at which, and the variegated ways in which, values, ideals and aesthetic forms blended and were combined, rather than simply replacing one another, in diverse cultural and political landscapes. It also brings to the fore the multiple ways in which Enlightenment legacies were revisited, appropriated, reshaped and contested well into the nineteenth century.

In terms of geographic scope, the essays adopt transnational and global perspectives. Transnational not in the sense of relations between nation-states (anachronistic in terms of the eighteenth century), but in the sense of individuals, books and ideas moving between imagined communities (defined in linguistic, political or religious senses), “across or between borders, and above or beyond them” (Wiesner-Hanks 2011, 358).¹⁶ Global, because we look at mutual exchanges between the two Atlantic shores, peninsular and American, of the Hispanic (and to some extent, the Portuguese) empire, which for obvious reasons do not fall into the category of “transnational” connections, as they involved territories that were part of the same monarchy and shared a common language (linguistic diversity both in peninsular Spain and in America notwithstanding). However, following the insights of works on knowledge circulation, we look at geographic specificity and “situatedness” (Raj 2016, 337) as well. That is, we combine interlocking scales ranging, where appropriate, from the local, regional or national to the global dimensions of the Enlightenment. We also consider overlapping contexts consisting of specific social and professional circles, communities of knowledge and practice: learned, middlebrow or even popular; aristocratic, polite, ecclesiastical; male, female or mixed.

We reject the idea of fixed and self-evident centres and peripheries or marginal spaces, already widely questioned in history and cultural studies (Raj 2016), but without ignoring the workings of power (political, economic, cultural) and resulting spatial hierarchies. The unequal configurations defined by geopolitics and economic and cultural dynamics meant that Spain, Portugal, Italy and the Greek-speaking territories were, by the eighteenth century, no longer playing the leading roles they had played in the past. We assume that the notion of centres and peripheries conveys, to a great extent, forms of consciousness and therefore ask which discourses, representations and practices help define certain places

¹⁶ See an argument for using “transnational” in early modern history too in Yun-Casalilla (2007, 660; 2019, 53).

as central and others as peripheral, both in the eighteenth century and in modern historiography.¹⁷ In relation to the cases most relevant to us, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece were perceived from Northwestern Europe, notably France and Britain—and to some extent by their own citizens—as having experienced decline from their respective and idealised golden ages: early colonial empires, the Renaissance, classical Greece and Rome. Concerns about backwardness weighed heavily, therefore, on the minds of eighteenth-century Southern European intellectuals. These preoccupations were expressed in reformist rhetoric and practice which were strongly gendered, as were the very notions of modernity and decadence in Enlightenment philosophy: gender norms and relations were considered indicative of the level of progress attained by each society, with those of Africa, Asia and America characterised by despotic treatment of women, Southern Europe stuck in an archaic past of domestic confinement, and North-Western Europe seen as the pinnacle of a modernity characterised by moderate government, commercial prosperity and complementarity between men and women (Andreu and Bolufer 2023).

We have made a deliberate point of incorporating views and voices from Spain, Italy, Greece, to some extent Portugal, and colonial Hispanic and Portuguese America. This perspective, infrequent in current scholarship, is both necessary and intellectually productive. Firstly, as explained above, because these areas are under-represented in general surveys both of Enlightenment and gender and of eighteenth-century circulation of ideas. Secondly, and more crucially, because such a vantage point offers a more comprehensive picture of Enlightenment practices and debates by adopting multipolar rather than bipolar approaches: a dynamic configuration of multiple centres, from Venice, including its former empire in the Ionian islands and the Balkans as a common, multilingual space and centre of intellectual activity, to the Atlantic as a vibrant channel of communication between peninsular Spain, Europe and Spanish America.

In line with not only the most recent trends in transnational history, but also a long-standing tradition in women's history and a revitalised biographical history full of transnational and interdisciplinary potential, we pay particular attention to the different actors involved in processes of cultural transfer and mediation. Drawing inspiration from recent

¹⁷ For useful reflections on the concepts of centres and peripheries, their limits and their potential, see Burke (2005, 82–88) (for periphery as a form of consciousness, 85). See also de Vito (2019).

approaches that question the “ubiquitous association between intermediation and mobility” (Raj 2016, 45), we look both at individuals who travelled widely and at those who performed mediations from their own specific locations: female and male writers, translators, travellers, printers and artists (painters, engravers), but also booksellers, journalists, reviewers, readers and correspondents.¹⁸ Some of our protagonists are well-known figures in intellectual and literary history (Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Isabelle de Charrière, María Rosa Gálvez), others are virtually forgotten despite having achieved a certain level of renown in their own time (Bianca Milesi, Maria Petretini, Jacob Brucker), while others again are obscure or anonymous. We consider them as agents inserted in their intellectual, personal and family networks, displaying varying degrees of agency, facing limits and obstacles, both interacting with their multiple political, cultural and social contexts, and helping to shape them.

GENDER AND CULTURAL MEDIATION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The book is organised in four parts. The first of these analyses how debate on gender was in the eighteenth century profoundly cosmopolitan in several complementary senses: because of its wide circulation and manifold appropriations, because of the interpretative ambition of its philosophical and historical schemes (which purported to embrace the progress of humanity as a whole) and because of the transnational experiences and readings of many of the women and men who participated in its discussions, which in turn played a part in shaping their visions of gender. The two central parts look at women of letters engaged in transnational, transatlantic and trans-Mediterranean mobility, whether of body or mind, through travel, linguistic and cultural translation, correspondence and image circulation. The final part of the book interrogates women’s involvement as target audiences, reading publics and library owners or users in transnational processes of knowledge dissemination.

The three chapters in Part I (“Discussing Gender in Transnational and Transatlantic Settings”) show how in the eighteenth century the debate

¹⁸ For inspiring discussions of the heuristic potential of so-called global biographies, see Cossart (2013) and Pons (2013).

on women's moral and intellectual capacities, continuing and modifying the centuries-long *querelle des femmes*, reached unprecedented heights of popularity and dissemination via all sorts of printed and manuscript formats. Its transnational dimension also expanded hugely, thanks to a vast number of translations and adaptations. Texts were circulated, adapted, targeted or challenged in diverse locations, through processes not of unilateral diffusion and passive reception, but of creative transformation, hybridisation and sometimes contestation. Mónica Bolufer analyses how a seminal Spanish essay, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo's *Defensa de las mujeres* (Defence of women, 1726), travelled across Europe and America. She traces its multiple translations into French, Italian, Portuguese and English, and the comments and appropriations it sparked in Europe and America, starting in its author's lifetime and continuing into the early nineteenth century. Those adaptations and echoes reveal in fascinating fashion how works can be rewritten, recontextualised and reframed across time and space by various agents (translators, printers, booksellers, patrons), both textually and materially (through different publishing formats and marketing strategies). These multiple adaptations therefore allow for a multicentred understanding of Enlightenment debates of gender, one that goes beyond the usual focus on the unilateral, radial dissemination and influence of French works. Although many of Feijoo's contemporaries found it paradoxical that a religious writer from Catholic, supposedly backward Spain, might argue for gender intellectual and moral equality, the fact that the portrait of the author (widely disseminated in Spain and America) was not included in any of the translations perhaps helped make the essay, symbolically speaking, a blank page on which different meanings could be inscribed.

Debates about gender did indeed travel across borders and circulate at a broad transnational level. Women and gender were absolutely key, for instance, to the historiographical revolution of the Enlightenment, as Silvia Sebastiani reminds us in her analysis of the works of Scottish historians and philosophers Adam Smith, David Hume, John Millar and Lord Kames. The new Enlightenment histories tracing the allegedly universal process of civilisation, that is, the evolution of mankind through successive stages of economic, social, cultural and moral development, placed women at their centre. In so doing, they laid the foundations of what today we call gender history, by historicising the role of women as civilisers of male manners and feelings and as agents of commerce, politeness and taste. Earlier studies of these theories (which became

widespread in Europe and America in multiple genres, from travel narratives to reformist essays) demonstrated how women were perceived as both agents and beneficiaries of progress, and how civilisation itself was seen as a process of feminisation. More recently, some have also pointed at the ways in which the “progress of the female sex” was inscribed in a geography of civilisation that was meant to be universal, as it embraced the whole of humanity in its reach, but which set Western Europe at its zenith, presented America and Africa as imprisoned in the savage stage, and Southern Europe (Spain above all) very much bringing up the rear. Sebastiani’s essay draws on all that scholarship, but takes a fresh approach by underlining the role assigned to women not only as agents of culture, but also as bearers of the human species (their reproductive labour having been concealed by an emphasis on the productive labour of men). Her essay also highlights the ambiguities and instability of civilisation even in modern and commercial European societies and how these concerns were symbolised by women: “excessive” female influence and power (including sexuality) embodied the limits of modernity and threatened an inversion of progress itself, a male fear that made manifest the dark side of historical progress and its potential circularity.

Mariselle Meléndez’s chapter covers debates on gender and education in Spanish American newspapers of the late eighteenth century, showing how they engaged in dialogue with contemporary discussions in Spain and Europe while being strongly shaped by their specific loci of enunciation. Colonial newspapers issued in the viceroyalty of Peru in the 1790s, such as the *Mercurio Peruano* in Lima and the *Papel periódico de la ciudad de Santafé de Bogotá*, were widely read throughout the Spanish empire, but also in Europe and North America. They functioned, Meléndez argues, as discursive platforms for gendered patriotic epistemologies that discussed the roles of women in the reform of society and the economy, paying particular attention to education and with an emphasis on local needs and customs. Women subscribed (in small numbers) to these periodicals and were among their readers; their voices appeared alongside those of men discussing the intellectual and moral capacities and social roles of their sex. These (real or fictional) female voices sometimes offered views on marriage, the authority of husbands and education of the young that clashed with more conventional opinions. The key question as to whether women’s intellectual limitations were due to nature or culture, however, received conflicting answers. This points to the open-ended character of a debate which, as Meléndez reminds us, persisted in the nations born out

of independence from Spain. Her chapter, like Bolufer's on European and American multiple and long-term adaptations of an essay defending gender intellectual equality and Sebastiani's emphasising the gendered paradoxes of progress, thus underlines the Enlightenment's contested legacy and its complex resonance and appropriations in the nineteenth century.

Part II ("Women of Letters Across Frontiers") sheds light on the ways in which women of letters crossed metaphorical and actual frontiers, and how that process and the strategies they actively developed shaped their image as intellectuals. The Republic of Letters constructed its members' public, transnational image through printed portraits of the learned. Lieke van Deinsen studies this iconographic tradition from the point of view of gender. Four prominent contemporary women (Laura Bassi, Italian; Émilie du Châtelet, French; Luise Gottsched and Magdalen Sibylla Rieger, German) were included in Jacob Brucker's *Bilder-Sal* (1741–1755), a German and Latin catalogue of famous intellectuals. This can be seen as a cautious move away from the exceptionalism of earlier initiatives, for example Nicolás Antonio's Latin *Bibliotheca Hispana Nova*, written in the late seventeenth century and published in 1788, with a separate section—*Gynaeceum Hispanae Minervae*—devoted to female Spanish writers. The more inclusive approach of Brucker's initiative suggests women were enjoying increased integration and authority in the transnational Republic of Letters, with female intellectuals actively participating in male projects to create and circulate their public, visual image. However, it also indicates the limits of both integration and authority, since their portraits were relegated to the end of each volume and their physical appearance was more commented on than was that of their male counterparts.

Female participants in this Republic of Letters were involved in debates, intellectual practices and often transnational experiences that helped them alter their view of the world and develop new ideas. As Anthony La Vopa forcefully argues in his essay, this is true of French intellectual Louise d'Épinay, whose visit to Geneva during the 1750s and the friendship she struck up there with Swiss physician Théodore Tronchin proved life-changing. She was introduced to a Republican political culture that she idealised for the marked contrast it represented with Parisian high society (*le monde*), a milieu with which she had begun to feel disaffected. This symbolic dichotomy did much to support her feminist convictions, already in the making in her essays and letters of that period. Her belief

that conventional gender differentiations alienated women from their true nature, and a work ethic based on the tenets of Stoicism which led her to reject *mondanité* and devote herself to strenuous intellectual labour, not only had an impact on both her later life decisions and her writing but, according to La Vopa, mean that she exemplifies the transition from early modern to modern feminism.

La Vopa also highlights the importance given to the act of writing as a form of introspection on the road to self-knowledge, an issue central to the essay that follows his, in which Amélie Jacques and Beatrijs Vanacker take us to the 1770s to scrutinise the strategies of self-construction and self-representation employed by women intellectuals in their letter-writing. The 2500 letters penned by Dutch-Swiss writer Isabelle de Charrière (who was educated in French), and specifically her correspondence with Scottish scholar James Boswell and French-German writer Ludwig Ferdinand Huber (her translator into German), allow us to explore her deliberate uses of multilingualism. Other female writers and translators also adopted the practice of multilingual writing, as examined in Part III of this book, but Charrière does so in exceptionally self-reflective style. Her strategic use of French, German and English adds nuance to the idea of the virtual monopoly of French and attests to the use of different languages in cultivated transnational letter exchange. It also sheds light on the meaning of these strategic linguistic decisions in terms of shaping and negotiating women's intellectual and authorial identity.

Part III ("Rewriting Through Translation") focuses on translation, both as a linguistic and cultural process and as a product. It looks at the specific and changing ways in which translation was used by women between the early Enlightenment and the advent of Romanticism. The essays here pay particular attention to the political and commercial dynamics of translation and its connection with travel writing—after all in English, though not in French, Italian or Spanish, the word "translation" can also refer to the physical movement of a person or thing from one place to another. Luisa Simonutti analyses the analogies between travel and translation, two experiences that involve mobility and the crossing of cultural frontiers and produce different forms of amalgam and hybridisation. The examples of Anne-Marie Fiquet du Boccage and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, travellers in Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as those of other women travellers who were also translators or artists, reveal their awareness that they were acting as mediators between cultures,

connecting worlds through writing, translating and/or painting. Translation also allows us to explore the particularities of women's travel writing: often less conditioned than men by literary commonplaces of their age concerning women of foreign cultures—e.g. Orientalistic tropes about Islamic sensuality—they built their authority precisely on the basis of their gender-specific experience.

While translation was not ranked as highly as original production when it came to making a writer's name, it could still be instrumental in achieving commercial success, particularly in the case of widely consumed genres such as novels and plays. This is clearly illustrated by the case of María Rosa de Gálvez, an extremely successful Spanish playwright, as we discover in the next chapter. Elizabeth Franklin Lewis chooses three works of the 1800s from Gálvez's extensive literary production (two translated from the French and one original drama, probably inspired by French, English and German sources) and analyses them to show how she used her own originality to serve her literary ambitions, becoming the most successful female Spanish writer of the eighteenth century and introducing new formats, notably in the genre of opera, to the Spanish stage. Gálvez did not merely "circulate" preformed texts and formats, but carefully adapted them to her national context and her local audience and market, incorporating her own aesthetic choices, changes and ideological identifications, with various parallels apparent between the contents of her translations and original works and her own life story. She, like other women translators of her time, thus left her mark on the Enlightenment, playing an active part in shaping its literary and mental landscape.

The careful strategies of domestication and adaptation often involved in translation are further illustrated in the Italian version of Maria Edgeworth's *Early Lessons* created by the Milanese intellectual Bianca Milesi Mojon in 1829, more than 25 years after the publication of the original. As Mirella Agorni shows in her essay, in the context of Romantic nationalism, translation became a highly political endeavour fostering a self-conscious and painstaking task of linguistic and cultural mediation. This allowed translators, including women, to gain a new visibility and prominence. Milesi chose to translate a work for children, a genre relatively new to the Italian cultural system, one considered fitting both for female and male authors, and broached by many women writers in Britain, France and (to a lesser extent) Spain. Her translation was a response to the contemporary concern with promoting national identity as part of a child's education and so ensured her instant success. That said, both

Mrs Edgeworth and Milesi were later dismissed as “feminine” and therefore minor writers and as a consequence were excluded from the literary canon.

A similar fate befell Milesi’s contemporary Maria Petrettini, a Greco-Venetian aristocrat studied by Elisavet Papalexopoulou. A polyglot who identified herself as Greek, Petrettini followed the Greek Orthodox religion, wrote in Italian and lived at the crossroads between the Habsburg, Venetian, Turkish and Russian empires. She was closely connected to Italian and Greek literary and philosophical circles, but did not explicitly engage with the Greek Revolution or the Italian Risorgimento. Instead, she developed her own female Enlightenment project by translating Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters* in 1838 (more than 70 years after the original publication) and by planning a literary history of Venetian women that remained largely unpublished. Her translation was a personal statement addressed to her intellectual friends and the Italian public, and at the same time a play of mirrors inspired by a deep personal identification with the author, both as an independent woman and as a philhellene. Petrettini was forgotten even sooner and more completely than Milesi, because—by contrast with the latter’s work—her cosmopolitan, transcultural, aristocratic and non-patriotic perspective did not suit the epic narratives of nation and revolution of her day.

Part IV (“Mediating Knowledge, Making Publics”) interrogates women’s involvement as target audiences, reading publics and library owners or users in transnational processes of knowledge dissemination. It considers the interplay and occasional clashes between the commercial construction of the “woman reader”, moral and religious campaigns aimed at regulating the female readership, and women’s real-life literary choices. What did women actually read? Did they primarily immerse themselves in pleasurable books, above all novels, as depicted in vivid eighteenth-century paintings of sensual *liseuses*? Or did they prefer the devotional materials vigorously recommended by moralists and educators?

Alicia Montoya’s essay deals with some of these complex issues by considering other, related questions: to what extent did the contents of women’s libraries differ from those of their male contemporaries of similar linguistic, cultural and social milieux? Where they did differ, was this echoed across Europe, or were those differences specific to particular territories? She seeks to answer these questions by delving into the hugely valuable resource that is the MEDiate database of eighteenth-century catalogues of private libraries, and focusing on those that were

owned by women, some of them Dutch, but most French. Quantitative data enable us to reconstruct the libraries of ordinary readers, male and female, but have their limits, starting with the fact that book possession does not equate to reading, as women often made extensive use of conjugal or family libraries as well as (and sometimes instead of) establishing their own. Montoya's findings confirm that women's libraries differed perceptibly from men's, containing more novels (particularly of the sentimental type), devotional literature and works aimed at a female readership; the differences are, however, less pronounced than is sometimes argued, requiring a detailed contextualisation of period, context and individual biographies. There is no such thing, therefore, as a typical "female library": what we usually identify as such is generally modelled on French, late eighteenth-century examples and connected with the heavily gendered category of *bibliothèque choisie* or amateur library (as opposed to the scholarly, male library or *bibliothèque universelle*).

What were the genres, contents and morals of the books targeted at women readers and which appear in both the male and the female libraries studied by Montoya, if in higher numbers in the latter? To what extent did they really address a specifically female readership rather than a broader audience explicitly or implicitly identified as "lay" or "uneducated", that is, in need (supposedly) of spiritual and moral guidance? How did such literature circulate in Europe and America, and what were its territorial specificities? How was the Catholic Church involved in its production, adaptation and dissemination? These key questions are addressed in the following essays.

Laura Guinot-Ferri traces the circulation and adaptation of books aimed at different female target readerships (women in general, nuns, girls, wives and mothers, midwives...) across the Spanish Atlantic: almost completely uncharted territory. She looks at movements in both directions, taking a multifocal perspective that considers works originally written or translated in the metropolis, but also original productions and translations created in New Spain (most of which were religious in content) and their dissemination back in peninsular Spain. Her conclusions align with new scholarship that challenges the traditional vision of the Enlightenment in Spanish America as merely derivative, backward and weak. The protagonism of the Catholic Church in book production and circulation and its dominant influence on cultural and intellectual life, including the education of girls, together with low literacy rates, explain the overwhelmingly religious nature of books written and printed for

women in New Spain. This was not, however, a static situation and, over time, the strictly spiritual gave way firstly to simply didactic texts and then, in the early nineteenth century, to a far greater variety of reading matter. Furthermore, the widespread presence of European books in the viceroyalty can be seen as indicative not just of passive reception but of cultural and social dynamism.

Patrizia Delpiano's essay looks at the active strategies employed by clerics and male lay figures involved in the more conservative and combative sections of Catholicism to control and moralise new and growing readerships: women, children, the uneducated. Their self-assigned mission was to protect these readers from what was seen in the eighteenth century as a "flood" (a powerful biblical metaphor) of dangerous books threatening religious faith and the social and political foundations of the Old Regime, including its gender politics. Delpiani looks specifically at the new genres of *contes* and *romans antiphilosophiques*, with a transnational perspective that points to their French origins and widespread European (particularly Italian and Spanish) adaptations and appropriations. Through the powerful image of the passionate female reader whose love of "immoral" and anti-religious books prevented her from fulfilling her prescribed roles of wife and mother, influential sectors of the Catholic Church sent out a wider warning to heads of families, educators and society at large about the dangers involved in reading. They actively sought to conjure fears of social, cultural and political change with an abundant literature aimed at giving a Catholic response to changing times. The roots of nineteenth-century Catholicism, with its heavy emphasis on women's role in counteracting secularisation, therefore lie in this solidly transnational eighteenth-century Counter-Enlightenment.

GENDER, MODERNITIES, AND THE GLOBAL ENLIGHTENMENT: FINAL REMARKS

These valuable contributions to the discussions surrounding women's mediating roles and the implications of gender in eighteenth-century cultural transfers and exchanges reveal the uneven nature of those processes. Our incorporation of a wider variety of countries and regions into the picture of the cosmopolitan, global eighteenth century, with a particular focus on traditionally neglected territories, does not lead us to claim that the latter played a leading role in that period—they did not, for

various political, economic and cultural reasons. Instead, and rather more importantly, it helps us problematise modernity itself, by highlighting its plural and not always converging paths.¹⁹

One specific example that reveals how examining these issues from the combined perspectives of gender and these Southern locations can both complicate and enrich our understanding of the answers to various thorny questions is that of the relationship between Enlightenment and religion—more specifically, Catholicism. Our essays confirm that we cannot simply resort to the hackneyed identification of modernity with secularisation or irreligion, of Catholicism with mere continuity and traditionalism.²⁰ Catholicism worked its own way to modernity. There were unquestionably enlightened men and women who were Catholics, and enlightened forms of devotion and spirituality (Mestre 1979; Lehner 2016). Moreover, while it was a resolutely confessional movement, the Counter-Enlightenment was simultaneously dynamic, proactive and in a certain sense modern, with its use of transnational networks (Lok and Eijnatten 2019) and Enlightenment genres and media. Even the strictest Catholic moralists did not only work in a repressive way, for example attempting to discourage so-called fragile readers (women first and foremost) from accessing sentimental and philosophical novels. They also acted, to use Foucaultian language, in a *productive* way, actively creating and disseminating new genres that dramatised the dangers of secularised modernity by embodying them in the figure of the woman reader. It is possible to argue that the influential religious component of Spanish America's intellectual, cultural and social life put certain restrictions on women's lives, but also that it allowed them some initiative as patrons and educators. Indeed, if modernity was considered in Enlightenment history and philosophy to be “distinctly feminine”, to quote Sebastiani, then women remained ambivalently placed in relation to it.

The essays in this volume also show that discussions on whether nature or culture determined gender differences, and whether the female mind was capable of sustained intellectual effort or only of aesthetic appreciation and witty conversation, continued to rage throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, circulating across languages and oceans and taking

¹⁹ On this issue, see in particular Pimentel and Pardo-Tomás (2017).

²⁰ On the debate about the category of “Catholic Enlightenment”, see Delpiano (2019).

many local, regional and individual forms. Individual writers' answers to these crucial questions displayed varying degrees of egalitarianism and were not always necessarily aligned with their moderate or radical stances towards other sociopolitical issues. Two examples seem particularly illuminating in this respect. Mme d'Épinay's feminist convictions developed in part from an idealised, ultimately elitist view of republican government in Geneva. Maria Petretti's enlightened project for a canon of women intellectuals was inspired by her firm belief in the emancipatory power of education, but also by her experience as a cosmopolitan aristocrat yearning for the stability of the old world of empires, rather than the new world of nation and revolution.

Translation as a heavily gendered practice and a creative intellectual and cultural process connecting local and transnational networks and discussions also allows for a decentred, multipolar view of the Enlightenment and of modernities. On the one hand, our essays confirm the multiple possibilities of translation for female literary endeavours. The fact that translation was considered to some extent a secondary, non-creative activity, and therefore deemed more fitting for women, had ambiguous implications. It helped women write under the rhetorical mantle of modesty (which often resulted in their invisibility), but also allowed them to make not only aesthetic, but ideological decisions and changes—to adapt works for new audiences, incorporate new genres and even express in more or less veiled ways their own, sometimes provocative ideas. The use of images can also be understood as a form of translation between written and visual culture: portraits of intellectuals, including some female writers, gave faces to the Republic of Letters and helped break down linguistic barriers via the power of iconography.

On the other hand, this book's in-depth consideration of the linguistic, political, cultural and religious contexts of translation reveals the sometimes profound modifications made to new versions, and the varied resonances acquired by works at different points in time and in different geographical and cultural locations. For example, the debates on the role of women and gender in the reform of the nation aired in Spanish American newspapers show how colonial loci of enunciation shaped preoccupations that were strongly local and at the same time engaged in active, reactive and creative ways to discussions happening in Europe. The examples of Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Maria Edgeworth, whose works were translated respectively in London, Paris, Lisbon, Rome, Naples and Genoa, in Padua and in Milan, also

suggest the crucial role of locality. Moreover, the fact that those translations were made decades, in some cases up to a century after the original's first publication, draws our attention to temporality. Instead of understanding these differed versions as a symptom of delayed, ultimately subsidiary Enlightenments, we have coined the notion of "transtemporal translation" to denote the process by which texts written long ago are adapted and re-signified and to explain why translators and readers connect with them, thus making them their virtual or symbolic contemporaries. This, for example, helps us understand women's contribution to nation building and the development of patriotic ideals and epistemologies at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Translating and adapting texts, negotiating the production and circulation of their visual image, travelling (and writing, translating or reading travel accounts), making deliberate use of multilingualism and weaving transnational epistolary networks across frontiers, these were some of the practices through which women of letters constructed their individual and collective identities. Their transnational reach was not, strictly speaking, new: women had been involved since Renaissance times in humanist Latin correspondence bridging linguistic, politic and religious borders, as well as in other family and epistolary networks or virtual communities of kindred spirits (Campbell and Larsen 2009). In the eighteenth century, the expansion of epistolary communication, as well as that of print circulation, offered them increasing opportunities to participate in the "transcultural and international dimension of what we today define as 'networks of learning'" (Vanacker and Van Deinsen 2022, 9) by creating their own intellectual, literary or scientific, personal and virtual networks or participating in existing ones (Maerker et al. 2023). Our essays show, for example, how textual and visual galleries featuring women of letters of both past and present were often transnational (as in Feijoo's *Defensa de las mujeres* and Brucker's *Bilder-Sal*), but at the same time nationally and regionally appropriated and reworked through the inclusion of figures chosen with specific reference to the translator or adaptor's local and social circles or national allegiances. Women intellectuals, in particular, built female genealogies reaching back in time and looked to other contemporary female writers to integrate themselves into transtemporal and/or transnational communities. Women readers were another imagined community that contributed to the development or adaptation of new genres and forms—from civil histories and sentimental, pedagogical or *antiphilosophique* tales and novels to children's fiction—both through

their actual reading practices and as a target audience influencing male and female authors, translators and publishers.

In short, the contributions to this volume bring fresh perspectives to the growing interest in the transnational dimensions of women's cultural agency and of gender debate in the Enlightenment. They connect approaches to eighteenth-century culture investigating the crucial roles of women and gender with those that are concerned with transnational and transoceanic travels, correspondence networks, cosmopolitan practices, circulation of books, periodicals and images, but often ignore their gender dimensions. Inspired by feminist studies and by criticisms of triumphalist global approaches, these essays do not take a diffusionist view of knowledge production and circulation in which ideas float unimpeded. By looking at the material and spatial dimensions of cultural transfers and the obstacles faced by the latter, at the porosities or rigidities of cultural and religious frontiers, at different kinds of mobility (geographical, linguistic, virtual and imaginary), as well as at the experiences of those with less opportunity to travel, they underscore the possibilities, but also the limits, of the gendered circulation of ideas, the circulation of ideas about gender and the mediating roles played by women in the Enlightenment.

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