

# A New History of Iberian Feminisms

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### 3 Women and "Civic Motherhood"

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As in the rest of Enlightenment Europe, eighteenth-century reformers in Spain sought to involve women in their plans for the cultural, social, and political transformation of Spain by emphasizing their gendered roles as mothers and wives. However, as Mónica Bolufer points out in the previous chapter, there was great disagreement among reformers over whether women's social influence could be public, or whether it should remain within the domestic sphere.<sup>3</sup> In the controversy over the admittance of women into the Royal Economic Society of Madrid (covered by Bolufer in chapter 2), Francisco Cabarrús argued for a strictly private role for women and for their exclusion from such public institutions as the Royal Economic Society:

Pero ¿acaso la moda y sus partidarios prevalecerán contra la voz de la naturaleza que sujetó las mugeres a la modestia y al pudor, o contra las relaciones inmutables de todas las sociedades que las impusieron como una obligación civil la fidelidad a sus maridos, el cuidado de sus hijos, y una vida doméstica y retirada? (Cabarrús 1786, 80)

(Perhaps fashion and its supporters will prevail against the voice of nature that subjected women to modesty and decency, or against the immutable relationships of fidelity to their husbands, the care of their children, and a domestic and secluded life that all societies have imposed on them as their civil obligation?)

For Cabarrús, as for many other Enlightenment men and women, women's role as mothers and wives was important to the state, but it was also to be strictly separated from that of men. However, some men and

women thought it was possible for women both to honour their womanly duties and, for a few exceptional women, to perform those duties publicly through their published writings and participation in various reform projects, serving as Spain's "civic mothers": nurturing the poor, encouraging industry and morality in working-class girls, and teaching middle-class women how to be better mothers and educators to their own children, especially their daughters – all for the good of Spain (Bolufer 1998, 371–88; Smith 2006, 161).

The notion of women's "natural" domestic role as residing within the idealized private sphere of the home was popularized by Rousseau's portraits of idealized femininity in the characters of Julie (*La nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761) and Sophie (*Émile, ou De l'éducation*, 1762), and this physical as well as moral division of the sexes was accepted in Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, becoming part of the construction of a modern society (Bolufer 1998, 353–60). Still, this separation of the sexes did not necessarily preclude women's social and even political influence. Leslie H. Walker has studied narratives and visual art production by eighteenth-century French men and women, finding in their works on feminine virtue a departure from Rousseau's idealized (and marginalized) Julie, with the development of a "maternal discourse" of female agency (Walker 2008, 16). In eighteenth-century British women's writing about motherhood and women's role in the education of children, especially of girls, Rebecca Davies finds that women "employed the trope of maternity to effectively gain social status for themselves as women" (Davies 2014, 1). As in the cases of France and Britain, women in Spain also worked within and beyond their social roles as both real and symbolic mothers to transcend their supposed confinement to the domestic sphere in order to participate both in their writings and in their actions in a very public "civic motherhood."<sup>4</sup> Here we will examine Spanish women's role in the public sphere, and the formation and their own expression of the concept of "civic" motherhood from the 1780s until the early 1800s, as seen in works on women's education by Josefa Amar y Borbón and Inés Joyes y Blake, in the activities and reports of women's civic organizations like the Junta de Damas (Ladies' Council), and in the writings of playwright and poet María Rosa Gálvez.

Josefa Amar y Borbón was one of the earliest and most forceful voices for women's rights and their social and political inclusion into modern Spanish society (see chapter 2 above), and was also a strong advocate for, and example of, Spanish civic motherhood. As a member of the Royal Aragonese Economic Society in Saragossa, Amar y Borbón

distinguished herself publicly not only by her intellectual endeavours (including two translations) but also by her work on a charitable project sponsored by the Aragonese society aimed at working-class girls, the School for Spinning (Pérez Sarrión 2003, 280; Sullivan 1992). Her aforementioned 1786 essay "Discurso en defensa del talento de las mujeres y de su aptitud para ejercer el gobierno y otros cargos en que se emplean los hombres" (Defence of women and of their aptitude for governing and other positions in which men are employed) earned her recognition on the national stage, as she gave a female voice to the controversy over admission of women to the Royal Economic Society of Madrid.<sup>5</sup> Amar describes the problem with women's restriction to domestic spaces, as Cabarrús and others had advocated:

Saben ellas que no pueden aspirar a ningún empleo, ni recompensa pública; que sus ideas no tienen más extensión que las paredes de una casa, o de un convento. Si esto no es bastante para sofocar el mayor talento del mundo, no sé qué otras trabas pueden buscarse. Lo cierto es, que sería mejor ignorarlo todo, y carecer hasta del conocimiento, que sufrir el estado de esclavitud o dependencia. (Amar 2012, 49)

(Women know that they cannot aspire to employment, nor to any public reward; that their ideas cannot go any further than the walls of their house, or their convent. If this is not enough to suffocate the greatest talent in the world, I don't know what other obstacles they could bring on. What is certain is that it would be better to ignore all of it, and even to lack intelligence, than to suffer the state of slavery or dependence.)

Ultimately, as Bolufer discussed in chapter 2, Amar's call for equal treatment for women through their admission as full members into the society was denied, and instead Amar herself was made an honorary member of the separate women's auxiliary group created in 1787 by King Charles III, the Junta de Damas. In 1790, Amar published a book on female education, the *Discurso sobre la educación física y moral de las mujeres* (Discourse on the physical and moral education of women). In contrast to the bold arguments in favour of women's abilities and advocating for women's political inclusion in Enlightenment Spain, her book on women's education seems to many critics much more measured, even conservative (Sullivan 1993). It is meant as a guidebook for mothers on the physical care of themselves and their children during pregnancy, childbirth, and infancy ("physical" education), as well as

a guide for mothers in the education and instruction of their daughters ("moral" education).<sup>6</sup> Amar believes girls should be taught by their mothers and not in the convent, as most middle- and upper-class girls were at the time. Her book gives mothers with the inclination to teach their daughters advice on the curriculum they should follow and an extensive reading list to help further guide them. Still, within the more practical advice to mothers on what to teach and what to read, Amar expresses through her book to and about mothers some important social and political messages in keeping with her earlier defence of women.<sup>7</sup> Education, says Amar, is important for women personally, as well as for their social role as mothers: "lo primero porque puede conducir para hacer más suave y agradable el yugo de matrimonio: lo segundo para desempeñar el respetable cargo de madres de familia; y la tercera por la utilidad y ventaja que resulta de la instrucción en todas las edades de la vida" (Amar 1994, 72; first to make the yoke of matrimony softer, second to carry out the respectable job of being mothers, and third for the utility and advantage that comes from instruction in all the stages of life). Women's education is good for society and for women too, and mothers who take an active role in educating their daughters are making important civic contributions. Yet in this *Discurso*, Amar has gone from decrying women's "state of slavery" in their domestic confinement, as she did in the previous "Defensa," to finding ways for women to live within their spatial and social restrictions and to learn to live with the "yoke of matrimony" (a theme discussed in chapter 4 of this volume).

Less than a decade after Amar's book for women, another mother, Inés Joyes y Blake, published an open letter to her daughters to accompany her translation of Samuel Johnson's novel *Rasselas*. Bolufer has called Joyes's "Apología" (1798) "one of the most lucid and vehement texts on women's condition in eighteenth-century Spain" (Bolufer 2009c, 27; and chapter 2 of this volume). Joyes tells women in her "Apología" that they have an important civic role in the success of societal reform and in Spain's future:

Tendreis la Gloria de reformar las costumbres haciendo amable la virtud; irá decayendo el lujo: vuestro exemplo hará moderados a los hombres: vuestros maridos os amarán y apreciarán: vuestros hijos os venerarán: vuestros hermanos se tendrán por dichosos con vuestro trato: vivireis felices quanto cabe en el mundo, y morireis con la gloria de dexar una posteridad virtuosa. (Joyes 1798, 204)

(You will have the glory of reforming customs making virtue desirable; luxury will decay. Your example will moderate men; your husbands will love and appreciate you; your children will venerate you; your brothers will consider themselves lucky to know you: all of you will live happily, and you will die with the glory of leaving a virtuous posterity.)

Both Josefa Amar y Borbón and Inés Joyes y Blake embraced a public maternal role through their publications, which were meant to inspire action in women to Spain's "virtuous posterity" without overtly contradicting their prescribed gender roles within confined domestic spaces. Other eighteenth-century women took on the role of "civic mothers" through their work with poor women and children, notably the ladies of the Junta de Damas, Spain's first civic organization for women not associated with the church, which was created to resolve the controversy over women's admission into the Royal Economic Society of Madrid (discussed in chapters 1 and 2). While individual women had served in other economic societies elsewhere in Spain, including the aforementioned membership by Josefa Amar y Borbón in the Economic Society of Saragossa, in Madrid this small but nonetheless significant group of well-educated, upper-class women publicly participated in social reform projects.<sup>8</sup> The first group of members in the Ladies' Council consisted of sixteen women, most of them from the nobility. They took on projects given to them by the men of the Royal Economic Society, including running the Madrid foundling hospital, the *Inclusa*, and the administration of the *escuelas patrióticas* (patriotic schools), which taught trades to working-class boys and girls. They also took on projects of their own, including the running of the Madrid women's prison La Galera, which later was taken over by another women's group (formed of members from the *junta*), the *Asociación de Señoras* (Women's Association). Each member of the *junta* was expected to attend weekly meetings, to be on committees, perform administrative tasks related to their various projects with women and children, and often to visit and bring supplies to the schools, orphanages, and prisons they supported (Demerson 1975; Martin-Valdepeñas 2010). In addition, each year a member was selected to deliver a public address, which was later published, reporting on her activities in the form of an *elogio de la reyna* (homage to the queen), María Luisa herself an honorary member and principal benefactor of the group (Lewis 2009). In the *elogio de la reyna* delivered by the Countess of Castroterreño María Josefa Gálvez in 1801, the womanly work carried out by both the queen and

the Ladies Council as civic mothers is exalted, simultaneously praising Bourbon politics and the success of the group's charitable endeavours. The Countess of Castroterreño praises the queen's "corazón sensible" (sensitive heart) and goes on to describe "la suavidad de sus palabras, el interés con que oye al afligido, la ternura con que le Consuela" (Gálvez y Valenzuela 1801, 10; the softness of her words, the interest with which she hears the afflicted, the tenderness with which she consoles). María Luisa as described by Castroterreño is the epitome of the sensitive maternal figure so exalted by men like Cabarrús. She is also protector and main benefactor of the *junta's* projects, the Galera women's prison, and the *Inclusa* foundling hospital, which Castroterreño touts in her speech. The orphans of the *Inclusa* are especially pitiable because they are motherless: "un infeliz en fin, a quien sin culpa suya nunca es concedido pronunciar ¡ay! el nombre delicioso de madre" (Gálvez y Valenzuela 1801, 23–5; an unhappy being, in the end, who without any blame, is never allowed to say, oh!, the delightful name of mother). Both the queen, and the ladies of the *junta* become figurative mothers who provide instruction to working-class girls, edification to women prisoners, and protection for Madrid's abandoned children.

Poet and dramatist María Rosa Gálvez (see also chapter 4) included a poem in the first volume of her collected works titled "Oda a la beneficencia," which praises the charitable work of the queen, the Countess of Castroterreño (who was her cousin), and the women of the Ladies Council (*Obras poéticas* 1804). In it, Gálvez praises her cousin as a "modelo venturoso" (fortunate model) of feminine virtue. She says of the *junta*: "Allí triunfa mi sexo; la Nobleza / De la corte española / A su Reyna benéfica imitando / La gloria de hacer bien disfruta sola" (Gálvez de Cabrera 1804b, 13; There my sex triumphs; the nobility of the Spanish Court, imitating its beneficent queen, enjoys alone the glory of doing good). The actions of the Ladies Council not only inspired poetry but also sparked the creation of similar groups in other parts of Spain, including Valencia and Málaga, that also saw opportunities in their regions to improve women's education and prison reform, as well as the care of foundlings (Bolufer 1998, 371–88).

María Rosa Gálvez, the Countess of Castroterreño's talented cousin from Málaga, was best known for her plays, fourteen of which were published during her lifetime and seven represented on the Madrid stage (see also chapter 4).<sup>9</sup> The drama *Zinda*, published in volume 3 of her *Obras poéticas* (1804) but never staged, is an interesting example of civic motherhood that combines the qualities of a strong political

leader with a fierce maternal protector in the figure of another queen and mother, the historical queen of the Mbungu people of the Congo (1620–63) Nzinga,<sup>10</sup> who fought against the enslavement of her people by the Portuguese. Just as Queen María Luisa was depicted as a benevolent mother and protector of the orphans of Madrid, so too the fictional Queen Zinda is presented as a defender of innocent victims – both of her own son and of her enslaved people. In act 2, after she has witnessed the destruction of her people and the imprisonment of her young son, Zinda contemplates her horrifying situation as both a mother and a queen: “Hijo de mi desgracia, tú del sueño / gozas el blando halago; y yo suspiro, / tiemblo, y me afano a contemplar tu suerte” (Gálvez de Cabera 1804c, 147; Child of my disgrace, you enjoy / the gentle satisfaction of sleep; and I sigh, / tremble, and I endeavour to contemplate your fate). At the end of the play, Queen Zinda is able to defeat the evil Dutch slave trader Vinter and to secure freedom for her son and her people. She too is an ideal model of civic motherhood, a woman of high station who protects and cares for those below her. She declares peace with the Portuguese if they renounce the slave trade, to which the Portuguese commander Pereyra responds: “¡Oh generosa Zinda! En ti se ha visto que la ferocidad cede, y se rinde / A la santa virtud y al heroísmo” (Gálvez de Cabera 1804c, 168; Oh generous Zinda! In you we have seen ferocity cease, and yield / To saintly virtue and to heroism). In *Zinda*, a feeling, yet strong, mother achieves success both for her family and her nation.

While civic motherhood in Spain did not necessarily contradict the Rousseauian model of strictly defined gender roles during the Spanish Enlightenment, a small group of educated Spanish elite women expanded their domestic roles to include the importance of their work not only within the family and the home as educators of their young sons and daughters but also outside the home with poor women and children. The civic motherhood they represented in their writings and actions posited a maternalistic society aimed at incorporating working-class women and children into Enlightenment reforms, thus complementing (and not contradicting) the Enlightenment paternalism that many *ilustrados* saw as necessary to achieve the progress they sought (Alemany 2005). While Spanish Enlightenment women rarely overtly challenged their gendered social roles as mothers, for a brief period some of them did challenge assumptions of male superiority, thereby proving themselves to be able intellectuals and civic leaders too. By the end of the Enlightenment period, one of the last of these civic mothers,

Tomasa Palafox y Portocarrero, the Marquesa de Villafranca, found herself struggling to continue the work of her predecessors, such as the aforementioned Countess of Castroterreño and her own mother, María Francisca de Sales de Portocarrero, the Countess of Montijo (one of the founding members of the *junta* who served as its long-time secretary). As president of the *junta* from 1817 to 1823, coinciding with the rise of liberalism during the Trienio Liberal (1820–3), Palafox and her sister *socias* found that although the new liberal government was taking up their causes through acts like the first Ley General de Beneficencia (General Law of Beneficence; 1822), liberalism was at best ambiguous about women’s role in social change (Espigado 2016, 268–70). The future women’s active participation in the public arena through their civic motherhood, passed from mother to daughter as Amar and Joyes had promoted, seemed destined to end, or at least pause, with Palafox’s generation and Spain’s Enlightenment.