

**Abreu-Ferreira, Darlene, *Women, Crime and Forgiveness in Early Modern Portugal*, Farnham, Ashgate, 250 pp, 2015.  
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Darlene Abreu-Ferreira adopts a gender perspective (writing from the point of view of women) in order to analyze conflicts in the everyday life of individuals in Early Modern Portugal. She draws upon a wide range of sources, ranging from several different areas in mainland Portugal to the Azores and Madeira. It can be said that most Portuguese territories are covered by her study: Faro, Évora, Porto, Guimarães, Viana do Castelo, Bragança, Ponta Delgada, Angra do Heroísmo, and Funchal. These historical sources include documents issued by the Crown, such as royal pardons and legitimizations, council minutes, the occasional parish register, and judicial records. Notarial records, which Portuguese historiography has underexplored so far (albeit with some exceptions), figure prominently among the documentation. Every historian knows that the survival of many such sources, especially the judicial ones, has led to their being widely dispersed at the local level. One of the most important sources, the *autos de querela*—written records where plaintiffs would explain their grievances, which the judicial authorities would then have to assess—were found only for Ponta Delgada in the Azores, a circumstance that gives a clear idea of their rarity.

The result of such research is a book that explores many episodes in which women are given center stage. A plethora of grievances are narrated. To mention just a few among many others, we can find unmarried women suing the purported fathers of their children, in order to oblige them to pay for the latter's upbringing; wives complaining about the damage that their husbands' extramarital affairs caused to the family economy; women being raped and impregnated by married men; mothers protecting the property of their orphaned children against other relatives or neighbors, etc.

The book has many merits, one of which is the fact that it avoids the general tendency to study only the elites and uses an approach that deals with a wide range of social groups, ranging from servants to craftsmen or *fidalgos*. It covers Portugal as a whole and not only a small region, paying special attention to the sixteenth century, which is

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generally underrepresented in the social history of Portugal's early modern period; and treating historical characters as real people and not abstractions. But perhaps the most important of all the book's merits is its focus on women, as gender is conspicuously absent from Portuguese historiography. It is not a work about women's history, because gender is explored within a relational framework, which seeks to place women within the family, and to tackle their ability to compromise and negotiate in situations where their wellbeing or survival is at stake. The main thesis of the book is that women's access to property, mainly landed assets, is crucial to the understanding of their autonomy and their power to decide on matters that affect them and their families. Rather than being passive subjects, women often take the lead in finding a solution to their problems.

However, the fact that many examples are taken from a wide range of different areas means that sometimes the local contexts are lost. Specificities such as local population dynamics and demographic issues (such as illegitimacy rates), or political and social configurations that might contribute to the outbreak of conflicts, are absent from the analysis. Another criticism that could be made is that the reader sometimes has trouble in trying to sort out the many characters and episodes that are written about, and single stories get lost in a multitude of plots. Very often, also, the sources do not tell us exactly what happened and why, or what was the outcome of a particular conflict; and in many notarial settlements resulting in the granting of pardon, we sense that the real agreements that took place are absent from the source, mainly in relation to the monetary compensations that were paid. In spite of these overly easy criticisms that can be made of the book, Abreu-Ferreira always tries to do what historians do best: hypothesize about the possible motivations of people, and then reconstitute, albeit tentatively, what happened, and what was at stake in those conflicts. The result is a very important book that may change the way historians perceive daily life, family, and gender roles in Early Modern Portugal. No small thing.