

〈研究報告〉

Women and Violence in 19th Century Brazil

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The womanhood which occurs in the Eves' monthly bodies has caught me for good.

Elisa Lucinda

On June 2nd, 1602, at the Police Secretariat of Espírito Santo Province, in presence of the respective Chief, Doctor Vitória Toscano Barreto, Delmira Romana da Victoria was asked the following question: [...] Did her husband die of natural causes or was he murdered? She answered that her husband attacked her and tried to kill her. Then, he fell down by himself and sustained a cut to the head. He then got up and directed himself again toward her with a knife, she grabbed a club and hit him two or three times on his head and body. She was asked once again if her husband had died in that fight. She answered that he died immediately after her attacks and thus his death was attributed to them. (APEES, 1862, Box 658).

Accused of her husband's death, Delmira told the police that he was drunk and this is why he easily fell down and she easily wounded him. He was a violent husband who was also feared by his neighbors. He was a known drunkard and was referred to as a 'parasite,' as he lived by his wife's funds. However, Delmira faced the shame of being arrested and taken to court.

This story inspires us to reflect on the hardships of her daily life. In this article, we intend to show women's violent interactions in daily life, as can be seen through the official documents of the county of Vitória, Espírito Santo Province in Brazil in the 19th century. We will use official records as sources and we have no doubt that these sources will allow us to grasp and understand the turbulent and brutal society women lived in at that time.

From a conceptual point of view, we will not consider crime and violence as a defection from law and order, but as an element to understand certain tendencies of social behavior. (ADORNO, in SANTOS, 1999).

The objective we propose here is to establish that criminal activity and collective violence are quite different sorts of behaviors. Each substantially requires different explanations and methods of investigation. It is obvious that crimes can be decomposed into a number of different kinds of behaviors and that police and correctional agents are in charge of its suppression. It can be said that crimes are the result of repression in a society. We suggest that various crimes usually happen together: Wolfgang and Ferracuti (1967) note that "subcultures of violence" provide a plausible starting point for the explanation of various behaviors in society.

In this light, the occurrence and the contention of violent behavior in criminal statistics and

in judicial documents show a reflection of the condition of women in this period. By focusing on female criminals with violence records, we intend to reveal the standards of ‘femaleness’. Not only classical ones, such as submissiveness and sensibility, but also hidden ones brought to light in police and judicial records, such as disorder, aggression and even murder.

Violence in Vitória in the 19th century

The social interactions in this article are confined to the county of Vitória, Espírito Santo Province. Considering the limitations of researchable sources, we chose to focus on the last half of the 19th Century.

Vitória, written at the time as “Victoria”, was characterized as the most important city of the province in the 1850s. In this period, the population of the province of Espírito Santo was of 49,092 (1856) (OLIVEIRA, 1951, p. 352). Almost 20 years later, in 1872, the census listed 70,585 inhabitants in this province, but Vitória accounted for 17,700 of the province’s residents, as population was mostly concentrated in the region of Espírito-Santo. Elmo Elton (1999, p. 13) explains that the city retained some colonial aspects. The streets were no more than five meters wide and the topography showed several elevations, because the city was located in a narrow strip of land between the sea and a central range of rocky mountains. However, there were no abandoned houses like in many cities in Minas Gerais; the pavements needed to be repaired by the government and the lightings were limited to the surroundings of the presidential palace.

The number of convictions in Vitória was on the decrease in the 19th century: three out of four crimes involved no victims, such as drunkenness, public disorder and various infringements according to the following table:

Table 1 Sample of Prisoner Convictions from 1857-1888

Charges	Prisoners	%	Cumulative %
Unknown	224	18,3	18,3
Public Disorder	184	15,1	33,4
Drunkenness	166	13,6	47,0
Minor Infringement	103	8,4	55,4
By Slave Owner’s Order	70	5,7	61,1
Disrespect of Authority	43	3,5	64,7
Police Inquiry	43	3,5	68,2
Suspicion of Felony	32	2,6	70,8
Vagrancy	15	1,2	72,0
Illegal gambling	6	0,5	72,5
By Police Order	4	0,3	72,8
Indecent Behavior	4	0,3	73,2
Total of prisoners	1221*		

Source: Police Chief’s report to the Province’s Governor – Police Stock – APEES – 1857-1888-¹

¹ This table does not show all crimes committed during this period.

Among the 1,221 prisoners, slaves represented only 23.5% (287) of the penal population. In this period, the total population of slaves in society was about the same percentage. We also notice that, in Table 1, 5.7% of prisoners were arrested by the order of slave masters. This shows that many Espírito-Santo inhabitants owned slaves and that jail was considered the best place to teach them a lesson. Only 21.9% of prisoners were women. Table 2 shows the motives of arrest according to gender.

Table 2 Comparison of Women and Men (1857-1888)

Charges	Women	%	Men	%	Total
Public Disorder	60	32,6	124	67,4	184
Minor Infringement	50	48,5	53	51,5	103
Unknown	45	20,1	179	79,9	224
Drunkenness	37	22,3	129	77,7	166
By Slave Owner's Order	14	20,0	56	80,0	70
Misrepresentation	11	40,7	16	59,3	27
Robbery	10	41,7	14	58,3	24
Abuse/Slander	7	46,7	8	53,3	15
By Police Order	7	16,3	36	83,7	43
Escape	7	35,0	13	65,0	20
Disrespect of Authority	6	14,0	37	86,0	43
Fighting	4	50,0	4	50,0	8
Physical Aggression	3	4,8	60	95,2	63
Suspicion of Felony	3	9,4	29	90,6	32
Punishment	2	4,2	46	95,8	48
Murder	1	2,1	46	97,9	47
Indecent Behavior	1	25,0	3	75,0	4

Source: Police Chief's report to the Province's Governor – Police Stock – APEES – 1857-1888-

Considerations

We do not deny that Espírito Santo was different from other colonial societies in 19th century Brazil. For women, there existed idealized social roles associated to docility and submissiveness; on the other hand, men were devoted to authority and leadership.

It would seem that the idea that 'men were to command and women were to obey' had a restrictive effect on the behaviors of women in this period. However, police reports and official documents reveal that it was not always so in practice: there was a questioning of men's absolute authority and women seemed to fight back against it, resulting in arrests and prison terms.

Considering the police and judicial sources in 19th century Espírito Santo, we clearly see that women did not accept the stereotypes that were imposed on them. They rather resisted physically and verbally, especially when men attacked them. They did not wait for help or protection, but tried to solve their problems on their own and, sometimes, even committed criminal offences in the process.

In the 19th century in the region of Espírito Santo, there were idealized models of women, which were associated with fragility, servility and “[...] subordination of sexuality” (SOIHET, 1997, p. 363). However, our observations show that there were women who did not submit to such ideals and who fought against such traditional images of women. Therefore, we conclude our observation with Souza’s statement as follows: “[...] many women escaped from the stereotypes and the idealized model that were created by society” (SOUZA, 2007, p.129). Even though society wanted women to live in a secluded world, they tried to fight the authority “[...] even at the cost of being marginalized” (SOUZA, 2007, p. 129).

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