

ALMS FOR THE RICH: *Impoverished Spanish Women in Pursuit of Making a Living in Late Colonial Lima*¹

ABSTRACT: This article establishes the role white women played in shaping the urban labor force and the economy in late colonial times in Lima, roughly from 1790 to 1822. It focuses on the impoverished elite women who, by the end of the colonial period, had to ask for alms to avoid working with their own hands. An important part of the Limeño elites could not respond to the twofold challenge: the negative consequences of the economic and administrative reforms of the Bourbons, and the relative flexibilization of the social order in Lima by the end of the eighteenth century. Instead of adapting to new conditions, the Spanish elites generated a social discourse that reaffirmed status and ethnicity as a means to distinguish themselves from the “vicious” plebeian sectors. More than one thousand applications to Church relief programs serve as the main foundation of this article; they are made up of at least one fifth of the white female population of the city in 1806. The article enters into dialogue with studies on socio-labor practices and the history of gender and ethnicity by engaging with concrete experiences of poor elite women in a city considered to be the opulent center of the Spanish colonial power.

KEYWORDS: colonial Lima, Bourbon reformism, history of women, history of poverty, labor history, history of prostitution, ethnicity

INTRODUCTION

[Although she belonged to] a well-to-do family with brightness and splendor in the past, the Divine Hand, which gives and takes back what is convenient to his creatures, condescended to bring her family into misery and call to his Saintly Glory her parents and husband, and with this absence begun her tragedy and scarcity. [While she enjoyed good health, she] obtained the natural and daily

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bread for herself and her two children working with the *aguja* [needlework] the only one industry of her sex and [social] quality.

—Doña María Magdalena de Echarri y Javier in her petition to the archbishop of Lima in 1806²

The personal story above is reflective of a common situation where many former economically and socially powerful families became poor due to changes in the economic and administrative structure of the colony in the aftermath of the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century. The situation was especially complicated because most Limeño elite households were based upon a fragile economic foundation: commerce and bureaucracy. Those affected by the reforms, women of all statuses—single, orphaned, widowed, married, or abandoned—faced the challenge of finding new ways of obtaining the means of subsistence.³

Spanish women from better-off social groups failed to adapt to the new circumstances. The spokesmen for the elites, and many women themselves, insisted on considering sexual behavior and the kind of labor they could perform as the most important ways of acquiring social credit and reputation, instead of acknowledging that work and socialization play a role. Therefore, they maintained that questions of honor prevented them, despite whatever necessity they experienced, from working outside the home in menial occupations. As a result, self-respecting women considered only a few laboring alternatives: making cigars and *limpiones* (masses of tobacco that were used to clean the teeth), clothing manufacture (textiles), and teaching girls.⁴

Hence, in a still patriarchal, hierarchical, and racialized society, these impoverished white women had only two options to survive and avoid social shame: undertake

2. Sección Pobres. Siglos XVII-XIX. File 1. Archivo Arzobispal de Lima [hereafter AAL] Mss. Application 96 [hereafter App]. This source will be referred as “AAL, Pobres” hereafter, followed by the number of the application.

3. The file contains more than a thousand requests to obtain the alms that the archbishopric gave to people of social “quality” (that is, those belonged to or pretending to belong to the local aristocracy), who had ended up poor due to different circumstances during the application of the Bourbon imperial reforms. According to an applicant, the archbishop kept special books in which he recorded the beneficiaries of the alms and the payments made (AAL, Pobres, App. 107) and in some of the requests it is said that the arrival of the new archbishop was “the opportune and proper time” for the ratification and the renewal of the list of *bis* poor (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 338, 360, 358, 309). It has been impossible to find in ecclesiastical historical archives the initial date of this relief practice, however we know that the two previous archbishops, Diego Antonio de Parada (1762–1779) and Juan Domingo González de la Reguera (1788–1805), had their special lists of the poor. Doña Melchora Geldres, a widow since 1771, was helped by the two of them before requesting more support from the new archbishop in 1806 (AAL, Pobres, App. 20). While parishes, monasteries, and brotherhoods distributed alms among poor persons of popular social sectors, the archbishopric centralized the financial aid for the *pobres de solemnidad* or elite poor. Limeño parish officials only recommended their needy congregation. For a case of decentralized charity in British parishes, see Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Steven King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor, 1750s – 1830s* (Montreal: McGill, Queen’s University Press, 2019), 41–42.

4. At least two claimants of church alms taught young girls as a way of making a living in 1806. This activity had noble goals and it was done either in the home of the governess or the pupil (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 120 and 531).

work at home or declare themselves *pobres de solemnidad* (solemn or shamefaced poor).⁵

To be sure, white working-class women did work outside their houses. Actually, despite what the anti-Spanish “black legend” says about the rejection of work by the Spaniards, we find that nonelite Spanish women worked in all urban and rural economic activities, even in the first huge industrial center of the city—the tobacco factory—in the second half of the eighteenth century. Hence, focusing on the two above-mentioned laboring options, this article looks at the role elite Spanish women played in shaping the urban labor force in late colonial times in Lima.⁶

Two related circumstances generated the need for elite groups to identify themselves anew. First, late colonial Lima society was undergoing a slow but sustained process of change. Far from still being a small face-to-face city, Lima had become home to both a very considerable permanent and temporary population. Second, in this larger city, new social actors emerged and, to a certain extent, questioned the statutory and caste order in place. It is also important to take into account the fear of the popular sectors (especially the indigenous population) following the rebellions of 1750 (in Lima and Huarochirí), the 1780–83 Tupac Amaru and Katari uprisings (in the southern Andes), and the revolutions in France and Haiti. In this context, the social elites saw the changes as a serious threat to their status; consequently, they reaffirmed the traditional discourse that ratified their superiority in society:

5. *Pobres de solemnidad* (solemnly poor or shamefaced poor) were elite persons (especially nonmarried women and widows) who became destitute but did not thereby lose their social status. This permitted them to be eligible for church financial aid and/or to be admitted to the city’s foundling house. Various studies on the city of Lima at the end of the colonial period show certain changes in its social, ethnic, and economic composition that allow us to think that these first fissures threatened the statutory and caste society. For overviews of the city in the time of this study, see Marcel Haitin, “Late Colonial Lima: Economy and Society in an Era of Reform and Revolution” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1983); Alberto Flores Galindo, *Aristocracia y plebe. Lima, 1760-1830* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1984); and María Pilar Pérez Cantó, *Lima en el siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid/Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1987). Other recent studies cited in this article refer to concrete changes in the economic and social aspects. On the other hand, for a study that remarks the difficulties of a change in mentalities in the eighteenth century, see the work on affective relations among social groups in the Andes by Jorge Américo Mendoza Vidal, *La historia del ser afecto en el Perú, siglos XVI al XVIII* (Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Fondo Editorial, 2013), chapter 5.

6. The article calls attention to the study of labor and the worlds of labor in Hispanic American history, a topic largely ignored by the scholarship on social and economic relationships. For recent Hispanic American experiences in labor studies, see the journal *REVLATT* of the Red Latinoamericana Trabajo y Trabajadores; for general views of female labor in Andean history, see Karen B. Graubart, *With Our Labor and Sweat: Indigenous Women and the Formation of Colonial Society in Peru, 1550-1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); for popular female labor in nineteenth-century Buenos Aires, see Gabriela Mitidieri, “Entre lavados y costuras. La ciudad de Buenos Aires vista a través del trabajo femenino en la segunda mitad de siglo XIX,” *REVLATT. Revista latinoamericana de trabajo y trabajadores* 6 (mayo-octubre 2023): 113–41; and for a varied social approach of the urban labor experience of Mexico City, see Sonia Pérez Toledo, Manuel Miño Grijalva and René Amaro Peñaflores, coords., *El mundo del trabajo urbano: Trabajadores, cultura y prácticas laborales* (México: El Colegio de México, Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2012).

they pointed to the “vices of the lower classes” as a social self-definition as the virtuous part of society.⁷

Significantly, in 1794 when the “enlightened” intelligentsia of Lima gathered around the *Mercurio Peruano* received the proposal to eliminate the juridical separation into two “republics” (of Spaniards and of Indians), in order to “form a single and indistinct body of nation,” the *Mercuristas* denied this possibility arguing that the separation into two “republics” was considered central to maintaining order in a society as divided as Peru.⁸

According to canon law (No. 529), almsgiving is a religious precept of charity, which, as a theological virtue, is exercised both by individual parishioners and by religious entities. Based on love of God and neighbor, material aid was to be destined for the truly miserable (*miserabiles personae*), and the Church was the main institution responsible for collecting and allocating resources to the poor, afflicted, sick, and abandoned. The parish priests, in general, were to care for the needy by distributing the alms collected in their churches, while bishops and archbishops were in charge of the needy belonging to the social elites. Numerous files used for this study mention sporadic and voluntary financial support given to the now poor elite members by powerful personalities and priests (generally their confessors). However, at the end of the eighteenth century, charity was no longer sufficient to cover the needs of the most deprived social sectors. Following secular and regalist principles, the colonial state sought to take charge of social assistance by opening numerous charitable institutions (hospices, poorhouses, homes for abandoned women, etc.), but the Church continued to be in charge of most of them.

To explain this phenomenon, the following analysis first presents the changes that affected the social elites of Peru and of Lima in particular. Second, it offers a picture of the city in the aftermath of the changes that occurred during the last three decades of colonial rule, emphasizing the laboring activities of the population, specifically those of elite women who saw their conditions worsened. Third, it addresses in detail the cases that motivate this study: the solemn poor in search of ecclesiastical help to avoid begging, social and labor degradation, or prostitution. To do this, the study employs a multilateral social approach: women of the impoverished elite are discussed within the context of

7. The speeches appear in the Limeño periodicals of the time. Especially in the articles by Hesperiófilo (José Rossi y Rubí), “Reflexiones históricas y políticas sobre el estado de la población de esta capital, que se acompaña por suplemento” [1791], *Mercurio peruano*, Edición facsimilar (Lima: Biblioteca Nacional del Perú, 1964-1966), t. I, 90-97 (hereafter *Mercurio peruano*); and José Ignacio de Lequanda, “Discurso sobre el destino que debe darse a la gente vaga que tiene Lima” [1794] *Mercurio peruano*, t. X, 104-05, 111-12, 114, 119-23.

8. D.E.D.P.D.L.M.L. (Francisco de Paula de la Mata Linares). “Carta remitida a la Sociedad, que se publica con algunas notas” [1794], *Mercurio Peruano*, t. X, 257-58, 259, 260, 278.

their gender and socio-economic and cultural conditions in the historical context of late colonial Lima. Finally, a case-by-case analysis of the many applications these women made for poor relief reveals that a colonial capital city that was considered opulent was in fact beset with serious difficulties for sustaining the elite on the eve of its independence.

LIMA, SOCIAL CHANGES, AND THE IMPOVERISHING REFORMS

Although very slowly and moderately, the society of Lima (as well as that of the other great cities of the Americas) underwent changes throughout the eighteenth century as a result of the autonomous economic growth and demographic recovery the city experienced during that time. The “inward” growth boosted the economic activities of the viceroyalty, and this also benefited the capital city. The rigidity of the tenure of large urban lots in Lima, however, meant that, at least following the end of the seventeenth century, the city’s new inhabitants lacked sufficient space for their homes. The two great earthquakes of 1687 and 1746 led to important transformations of the living conditions of the elite since the rich and the poor had to share spaces, even in a city as large as Lima, which lacked special boroughs for different social and ethnic groups. Indeed, numerous urban owners in financial trouble designated parts of their houses for renting to propertyless new dwellers (merchants, craftsmen, clerks, and officials of middle ranks), while the traditional interior *patios* were transformed into *corralones* and, later, into *callejones* for poor new residents. In fact, during the time period this study examines, most Limeño lived in such precarious conditions. Physical coexistence of the rich and the poor was far from egalitarian but helped to erase some of the differences in treatment between castes and social groups.⁹

Under these new economic conditions, people from lower socio-economic sectors had more doors opened to them thanks to growing industries such as manufacturing and craft, as well as the services industry. The city’s connections to internal and external markets allowed for some improvement in economic conditions for small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs. Those who accessed the traditional medical trades (surgeons and barbers) and new university professions also improved their situation, as well as the first echelons of the civil administration, ecclesiastical posts, and military hierarchy (in the urban militias and the garrison of the Callao port).

The other source of changes during this time was the Bourbon reformism. In the case of Hispanic America, these reforms sought to reverse the situation that since

9. *Corralón*: rooms around an interior *patio* (yard); *callejón*: rooms following narrow pathways that span the entire interior *patio*.

the mid-seventeenth century had widely favored the so-called Creoles elites (proprietors and local bureaucrats). The relative autonomy enjoyed by the colonial “kingdoms” began to be drastically curtailed by the reforms. The main measures were issued beginning in 1760, during the governments of Carlos III and Carlos IV. The economy and finances of the colonies were restructured, but also church-state relations, social hierarchies, public morals, and the place of spouses in the family, all of which are central to our discussion.

As to be expected, measures of the Bourbon reformism affected the different Peruvian economic and social groups unevenly. Some local entrepreneurs and officials were even able to take advantage of the new conditions by adapting their businesses and loyalties to the new rules. The modification of the commercial monopoly (the famous “free trade”) meant the multiplication of products exported from or through the peninsula to the colonies and the control of foreign and domestic trade by large Spanish trading firms. In addition, tax collection was reformed to better control colonial revenues. The counterpart of the reforms should have been the incentive for the local production of raw materials of agricultural and mineral origin for the metropolitan industry. Yet, the Peruvian viceroyalty did not have spectacular results in the diversification of its economy. Indeed, beyond the production of silver that reached important levels, Peru did not see new large productive activities as other colonies did with cacao, tobacco, indigo, cotton, leather, copper, etc. Even the old and large textile manufacturing centers (*obrajes*) gave way to the so-called *chorrillos* (medium-sized and small rural workshops). Thus, Peru’s late colonial economy generated mostly middling local fortunes that were widespread in all productive branches both in the countryside and the cities. The really rich people were few, and they were mainly foreign merchants.¹⁰

Political and administrative reforms also impacted the Creole elites. Important territorial cuts with the creation of new viceroyalties in South America reduced Peru’s population and economic resources. New institutions aimed at controlling economic activities and the shift in preferences for colonial administrative offices in favor of *peninsulars* (Spaniards) affected the positions and expectations of the property-owning families and local bureaucrats who were partly displaced from their positions of control in the most important political, administrative, and judicial institutions. The university, Church, urban

10. For a recent general vision of the Peruvian economy in late colonial times, see the essays in Carlos Contreras, ed., *Economía del período colonial tardío. Compendio de historia económica del Perú. Tomo 3* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, 2010), and Bruno Seminario, *El desarrollo de la economía peruana en la era moderna. Precios, población, demanda y producción desde 1700* (Lima: Universidad del Pacífico, 2015), chapter 5.

militias, army, and the navy were among the few institutions that allowed, at least partially, the Creoles to climb the short social ladder.¹¹

It should not be surprising, therefore, that by the end of the eighteenth century the spokesmen for the Limeño elites put the social question on the table, seeking to reaffirm their superior social condition and presenting the social situation as one of reigning “chaos” that turned things upside down. To redefine themselves in terms opposed to the popular sectors, they described social hierarchies using corporate categories of castes and estates in speeches, an intellectual field that they controlled and that allowed them to reaffirm themselves as superiors without having to recognize the changes in society that, although limited, must have loomed heavily in times of rebellions and revolutions. To a great extent, Hipólito Unanue, José Baquíjano, José Ignacio de Lequanda, José Rossi y Rubí, Jaime Bausate y Mesa, and Juan Antonio de Olavarrieta, authors of articles in the *Diario de Lima* (1790–91), the *Seminario crítico* (1791), and the *Mercurio peruano* (1791–95), marked clear differences between the ancient and virtuous elite and the vicious popular groups (including the emerging social sectors). Significantly, the *Semanario crítico* was the first periodical dedicated to women’s education in Spanish South America, and female honor and labor would be among its most important topics.

HONOR, WOMEN, WELFARE, AND POVERTY IN LATE COLONIAL LIMA

All available studies about women and gender have shown that the Hispanic American colonial society generated a discourse about women based on the virtues of honor that established what their social behavior principles should be: obedience, honesty, fidelity, piety, prudence, modesty, demureness, respectability, industriousness, and *recogimiento*.¹²

11. Mark A. Burkholder and D.S. Chandler, *From Impotence to Authority: The Spanish Crown and the American Audiencias, 1687-1808* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 195–220; David-Sven Reher, “Las reformas borbónicas y la oligarquía limeña a finales del siglo XVIII,” *Actas de la Mesa Redonda sobre América Hispánica en 1776* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1980), 29–63; José Francisco Gálvez, “Burocratas y militares en el siglo XVIII” in *El Perú en el siglo XVIII. La era borbónica*, Segunda edición, ed. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fundación M.J. Bustamante de la Fuente, 2015), 248, 256–58; and Juan Marchena Fernández, *Ejército y milicias en el mundo colonial americano* (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992).

12. Studies on women and female honor in colonial Lima are mainly based on documentation of marriages and divorces. See, especially, the recent state-of-art essay of María Emma Mannarelli, *La domesticación de las mujeres. Patriarcado y género en la historia peruana* (Lima: La Siniestra Ensayos, 2018); Luis Bustamante Otero, *Matrimonio y violencia doméstica en Lima colonial (1795-1820)* (Lima: Universidad de Lima, Fondo Editorial/ Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2018); and Claudia Rosas Lauro, ed., *Género y mujeres en la historia del Perú: del hogar al espacio público* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2019). Among Latin American colonial studies on gender and society, see Silvia M. Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University

However, this is insufficient for understanding how relationships between persons and social groups worked in a city like Lima at the end of the colonial period. There are aspects of the city that have not received enough attention in the historiography. In particular, it should be considered that late colonial Limeño society had a complex social hierarchical order based on social, ethnic, and socioeconomic identities. Thus, in addition to dividing into genders and ages, society recognized “states” or sectors of the population that shared characteristics of social status (nobles and commoners at different levels), ethnic-cultural castes (Spanish, indigenous, Black, *mestizo*, etc.), and social and economic conditions (owners at different levels, small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs, dependent and independent workers, enslaved in various circumstances, unemployed). These criteria were not exclusive. Hence, the relative social mobility and urban population increase of the late eighteenth century threw into question the nominal rigidity of traditional social norms. Indeed, for the purposes of this study, social mobility was twofold. On the one hand, Spanish women lost social and economic status, and ended up in the poor house, acknowledging their condition as solemnly poor, or they went voluntarily to work at the tobacco factory (which actually had more Spanish men and women than other castes). On the other hand, the relative social flexibility allowed men and women from other social sectors to pretend to consider themselves as part of the elite by imitating the refinement, customs, attire, and ornament of those higher up in the social scale.¹³

Two concrete and interrelated issues are central to understanding the argument of this article on the precariousness and vulnerability of impoverished elite women and the job options they had in late colonial Lima: widowhood and social welfare in a premodern and colonial society. A Limeño household might have been very powerful and very fragile at the same time. A large group of relatives could share a household and live at the expense of the patriarch, giving him large numbers of subordinates and considerable control over them. The stability and continuity of the group depended on its political relationships and economic bases in trade, land, and/or bureaucratic positions. However, part of the social elite was exposed to abrupt changes when unforeseen circumstances

Press, 1985); Lyman L. Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, eds., *The Faces of Honor: Sex, Shame, and Violence in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Asunción Lavrin, ed., *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), and Verónica Undurraga, *Los rostros del honor. Normas culturales y estrategias de promoción social en Chile colonial, siglo XVIII* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria & Centro de Investigaciones Diego Barros Arana, 2012).

13. In addition to the purchase of noble titles by the mercantile elites, merchants and trade agents sought to “exchange” money for nobility through convenient marriages with women from the social elites (always ensuring ethnic and cultural coincidences). A good case study on this point is Jorge Pérez León, “El éxito social entre los emigrantes peninsulares en el Perú: integración, prestigio y memoria,” *Cuadernos dieciochistas*, 15 (2014): 241–75.

occurred, especially in times of crisis. The fragility of the family group became evident when the provider of resources lost his job, fell ill, deserted the household, or died. Property-less families and their retainers were left at risk if there were no other family members ready to support them. The cases were especially dramatic if the new head of the household was a widow with no source of income, including the lack or insufficiency of the dowry given at the time of marriage. Widows were a large portion of the applicants to Church relief programs; this shows the increasing vulnerability of their condition.¹⁴

Their helplessness was intensified in a society with a premodern welfare system based primarily in religious charity. Thus, the other issue deals with the capacity of society to face the increasing problem of urban poverty. Catholic charity implies the necessary and interdependent coexistence of the poor with the rich. Hence, in addition to the church hospitals and the old orphanage for the poor (founded in 1603), the colonial state established in 1770 the Hospicio de Pobres, or foundling house, with a textile workshop in the indigenous neighborhood of El Cercado. Clearly, this was not enough to solve the problem.¹⁵

14. There are only few specific studies about this ample part of Limeño society. An excellent but brief overview is the work of Christine Hünefeldt, who had worked partially with the main information in this study. See Christine Hünefeldt, "Penas y penitas de las viudas limeñas en el siglo XIX," in *¿Ruptura de la inequidad? Propiedad y género en la América Latina del siglo XIX*, eds. Magdalena León and Eugenia Rodríguez Sáenz (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2005), 277–80. For the conditions of widowhood in Spain, see Margarita María Birriel Salcedo, "Sobrevivir al cónyuge: viudas y viudedad en la España moderna," *Chronica nova*, 34 (2008): 13–44. For Hispanic America in general, see María Teresa López Beltrán and Marion Reder Gadow, coords., *Historia y género. Imágenes y vivencias de mujeres en España y América (siglos XV–XVIII)* (Málaga: Diputación provincial, 2007). For Mexico, see Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, "Viudas en la sociedad novohispana del siglo XVIII. Modelos y realidades," in *Tradiciones y conflictos: historias de la vida cotidiana en México e Hispanoamérica*, coords. Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru and M. Bazant (México: El Colegio de México, El Colegio Mexiquense, 2007), 231–62, and "Por decisión o necesidad. La jefatura femenina en los hogares de México virreinal." *Revista de historiografía* 26 (2017): 47–66.

15. Among the few studies on poverty and charitable institutions in colonial Peru, see Elsa Griselda Valdés Myers, "Social Welfare in the Peruvian Viceroyalty of the Sixteenth Century" (PhD dissertation, Brandeis University, University Microfilms, 1969); Richard Chuhue Huamán, "La piedad ilustrada y los 'necesitados' en Lima borbónica. Una aproximación hacia la plebe limeña y el manejo institucional en el siglo XVIII," *Summa historiae. Revista de estudios latinoamericanos* 1 (2004): 109–25; and Claudia Rosas Lauro, "Vagos, ociosos y malentrenidos. La idea de pobreza en el Perú del siglo XVIII," in *La marginación en el Perú, siglos XVI–XXI*, ed. Claudia Rosas Lauro (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2011), 115–40. Perhaps the most encompassing studies for other Hispanic American settings are María Himelda Ramírez Rodríguez, *De la caridad barroca a la caridad ilustrada: mujeres, género y pobreza en la sociedad de Santa Fe de Bogotá, siglos XVII y XVIII* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2006), capítulo 4; and María Guadalupe Candelas Granados, *Del dicho al hecho, "Discursos sobre la pobreza y práctica de la caridad en Guadalajara durante el siglo XVIII"* (unpublished thesis in History, Universidad de Guadalajara, 2025). For the extensive recent discussion on the nature of poverty in preindustrial settings, see Robert C. Allen, *Poverty lines in History, Theory, and Current International Practices*, University of Oxford, Department of Economics, Discussion paper series, no. 685 (December, 2013); E. Philip Davis and Miguel Sanchez-Martinez, *A Review of the Economic Theories of Poverty*, National Institute of Economic and Social Research, NIESR, Discussion papers no. 435 (London, 2014); Guido Alfani, *The Rich in Historical Perspective. Evidence for Preindustrial Europe (ca. 1300–1800)*, Innocenzo Gasparini Institute for Economic Research, working paper series no. 571 (2016); Guido Alfani, Francesco Ammannati, and Wouter Ryckbosch, *Poverty in early modern Europe: New approaches to old problems*, European Historical Economics Society, EHES, Working paper no. 222 (January 2022).

Therefore, the social policy of the epoch relied on private philanthropy and the Church. While the Church attended to the needs of the broader society, private philanthropy of well-to-do social sectors attended their own needy acquaintances. Notwithstanding, the upper hierarchy of the Church assumed the relief of the impoverished members of the social elite in a context of the economic crises of the late colonial period. In a society with no relief system for the elderly (welfare), only high-ranking military officers had a *montepío* (pension) that provided resources to their widows and daughters. In general, retirement is a scarcely studied issue in colonial times.¹⁶

THE RICH AND THE PAUPER

This section seeks to characterize the Limeño society of the time based on population censuses and descriptions of contemporaries. Lima during the last decades of colonial times reserved its preeminent political, administrative, and residential functions for the economic, social, and cultural elites of the viceroyalty. Contemporary observers are aiming to help historians determine whether or not the city was in decline during this period.

The summary of the 1790 census provides useful information on the activities of the population. Of a total of 52,627 inhabitants, 4,831 (almost 10 percent) resided in communities (monasteries, colleges, hospitals, hospices, and prisons). Despite the obvious inaccuracies in the data, the occupations of 16,791 people are known—that is, almost all the adults. There were registered, among others, 90 landowners, 393 merchants, 308 farmers, 363 day laborers, 1,027 artisans, 60 manufacturers, 48 bakers, 287 grocery stores, 474 white servants, 2,903 caste servants, and 5,063 male and 4,166 female enslaved people. Nonetheless, there are important gaps in information about the popular sectors of the city. Especially, about female commoners.¹⁷

Lima was one of the largest cities in the colonial Americas. It was a redistributive commercial center and a good market for its own and imported products. The city was home to large manufacturing workshops using vicuña wool (hats), leather (saddles, sword scabbards, and especially footwear), and tallow (candle and

16. Two cases of *montepío* were among petitioners of the ecclesiastical allowance in 1806. Upon the death of her husband, an army lieutenant colonel, doña Lisa Montalvo was left with three maiden daughters. She lost the *montepío* for remarrying a junior officer. Doña Eusebia Lozada, widow of the lieutenant colonel and inspector of the battalion of Mulatoes of Lima don Antonio Bello, stayed with “an extensive family and two maiden daughters.” She remarried without authorization from the military command and, thus, lost the *montepío*. However, by a special grace she was assigned a small pension of 20 pesos a month. Nevertheless, she asked for the ecclesiastical aid because the 20-pesos pension was, in fact, too small (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 3 y 88).

17. *Mercurio Peruano*, t. 1, 97–98. A fine social study of the census in Marcel Haitin, “Late Colonial Lima.”

lard shops), as well as wheat mills, but it had not developed a textile industry based on the cotton that the coastal valleys could easily supply, or the abundant sheep wool from the adjacent mountainous regions. The accountant José Ignacio de Lequanda referred to the absence in Lima of factories and added that Spanish women had few resources to subsist in the city because they lacked the spinning wheel and the loom:

“[S]ewing does not bring them enough utility because this branch is short, both because of the few works that are offered to them, and because they all [Spanish women] attend it as the only exercise, since most of the works come from Spain, they lack pabulum for their entertainment and profits.”¹⁸

Instead of large workshops, the city had a highly developed system of home work fed by commercial interests (disseminated manufacturing). A good part of the population lived in rented rooms in houses and in *callejones* (slums, hovels) where they worked with the raw materials provided by merchants or fellow organizers of production (wool, fabrics, leather, metals, wax). Plebeian women made or mended garments in their rooms (seamstresses) and twisted and tied tobacco at home or in the tobacco factory.¹⁹

Owners of the large haciendas and plantations in the surrounding areas resided in Lima. However, the valleys of the capital city were narrow and, even then, they were crowded with more than two hundred properties. For this reason, in reality, most of the landowners were small and medium farmers (*chacareños*). The services industry employed another large sector of the population. The majority of inhabitants were porters, bleeders, and water carriers, but above all street vendors and servants. A portion of the servants worked in a dependent manner in private homes and institutions, but it's possible the majority worked independently, offering their work in a very competitive market due to the abundance of the enslaved and free *jornaleros* or day laborers. The most common activities of commoner women were domestic service, sewing for the market, and doing laundry for elite households.

The white Limeño elite was related to bureaucratic and commercial functions. In addition to rural and urban landowners, the city was home to large numbers of civil, military, and ecclesiastical officials who lived on fragile incomes, often with large families that were further inflated by in-laws, servants, other persons

18. José Ignacio de Lequanda, “Idea succinta del comercio del Perú,” 620, 623.

19. For the productive economy of colonial Lima, see Francisco Quiroz Chueca, *Artisanos y manufactureros en Lima colonial* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, 2008).

with spiritual ties, and widowed daughters who returned home with their own families.²⁰

Travelers and residents agreed that late colonial Lima had few families with large, accumulated capital. Especially if compared to Mexico City. In Lima, only a few families were reputed to be millionaires, and no private house in the city was built at costs above 300,000 *pesos*, nor were there families with more than thirty servants in their urban home as there were in Mexico. Lima did surpass Mexico City in titled aristocracy and nobility, though. The number of titles of Castile was greater in Peru, and, for the most part, those people resided in the capital. Peru had at least 105 noble titles, which included one duke, 58 marquises, 45 counts, and one viscount, while in New Spain there were only 63 titles.²¹

The last decades of the eighteenth century show a city with changes to its composition, but not a city in crisis. Now, the city had fewer rich people, but more persons with medium fortunes. However, what Lima did have was growing poverty, which was more evident from the mid-1790s forward. Indeed, in his famous essay on the population of the city of Lima, contemporary essayist José Rossi y Rubí described the old merchant oligarchy which did not dominate the trade anymore and had “just short profits because incomes are [now] distributed among more people.” Moreover, he stated that the commercial activity was thriving in ways that favored the middle sectors of the citizens, the artisans, the petit merchants, the journeymen, and the vendors.²²

This statement might have been right for the time Rossi y Rubí was writing (the early 1790s), but not accurate in the following years, when the negative outcomes of the reforms for Limeño economy became more apparent. In a well-known essay on Limeño vagrants and the ways to overcome their situation, the accountant José Ignacio de Lequanda, for instance, held an opposite opinion in the pages of the same publication only three years later. Although also a fellow at the Sociedad de Amantes del País, Lequanda denied what Rossi y Rubí had affirmed, pointing out that the old opulence had turned into scarcity and even misery. Lequanda’s aim was to discuss how to deal with the increasing poverty and vagrancy in the city, a problem he viewed through a social approach that

20. Haitin, “Late Colonial Lima”; Alberto Flores Galindo, *Aristocracia y plebe*; and María Pilar Pérez Cantó, *Lima en el siglo XVIII*; Gabriel Ramón (2015). “Urbe y orden: evidencias del reformismo borbónico en el tejido limeño,” in *El Perú en el siglo XVIII*, ed. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy, 299–328.

21. On the nobility of Lima in the period under study, see Paul Rizo-Patrón Boylan, *Linaje, dote y poder: la nobleza de Lima de 1700 a 1850* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2001), and Arnaldo Mera Ávalos, *La nobleza limeña titulada ante el protectorado* (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú, 2022).

22. Hesperiófilo (José Rossi y Rubí), “Reflexiones históricas y políticas sobre el estado de la población de esta capital,” 96.

employed ethnic and statutory categories typical of an estate and corporate perspective.

The explanation given by Lequanda must have fully satisfied the city's white elites. In a city that already had serious social difficulties, the elite saw the problem from a corporate perspective, which allowed them to establish sharp differences between themselves and the popular sectors while reaffirming the need to return to the traditional mechanisms of social control that had worked so well for centuries: the statute and caste social order.

Lequanda's view is important for this study. He described a portion of the elites as lacking of occupations because they were part of large households. Indeed, he stated that impoverished Spaniards did have a disposition for work, whether male or female, but they could not practice crafts because these activities were already in the hands of "inferior" ethnic groups, and therefore they were involuntary unemployed. An unemployed Spaniard who lived honestly in his household was, in his view, not to be considered a vagrant. Actual vagrants were those who were able but lived at the expense of charity, and those males who exercised activities considered fitting for females. As a result, he estimated the number of idlers in the city by simply subtracting the numbers of Spaniards, Indians, and Blacks from the total population. That is to say, he attributed to all *mestizos* and castes the condition of lazy (more than half of the total inhabitants of the city).

Still, he ended his social analysis with a call to help "the other sex that lacks a useful and honest application." In his vision, Spanish women were miserable (worthy of support) and urgently required help "to avoid the disorder that necessity brings in itself" (in a veiled reference to prostitution) and to achieve the "fixing of old bad habits" with a "good order," and from there "the advances of the mechanical and liberal arts will also be born." An additional result would be, for Lequanda, that with fewer idlers, there would also be fewer sins, and consequently, "the punishments with which providence afflicts the ravaged peoples will not be so repeated." This last statement is a reference to the explanation in force at the time placing the origins of earthquakes in "public sins," especially women's immoralities.²³

A decade later, the Spanish scientist, Hipólito Ruiz, depicted the character of the Limeño Creoles more plainly but in the same negative terms. According to him, the Spanish Limeños were "adorned" by all imaginable defects but not the

23. José Ignacio de Lequanda, "Discurso sobre el destino que debe darse a la gente vaga que tiene Lima"; Lequanda, "Idea sucinta del comercio del Perú," 628.

Limeñas. Ruiz mentioned the *sopa de convento* [convent soup], without which, he stated, “several people would starve.” Following Lequanda, he attributes poverty to the lack of occupations for white persons because the castes monopolized the trades and, more importantly for our purposes, the fact that white women abandoned the needlework that they used to do in the past due to increased imports of thrift, cloths, and embroidery.²⁴

There were two types of speech. One aimed at elite women, referring to the ideal behavior of the Spanish woman in accordance to the concepts of honor of the household and the family in general, combining traditional and modern argumentations.²⁵

In the hierarchical system of the time, women from popular sectors lacked honor, had all imaginable depravities and, therefore, did not possess any virtues. However, through imitation they tried to appropriate the elitist discourse in order to be accepted as persons of honor. Court cases of transgressions (or attempted transgressions) show common women claiming the noble particle *doña* and demanding to be heard in lawsuits about female honor in society. These cases speak to claims of social equality that often were manifested as “whitening.” For this reason, it was especially important to highlight the vices of the plebeian sectors, by contrast, to underscore the exclusive virtues of the women of the social elites.²⁶

The other type of discourse deployed notions of hygiene and the modernization of social manners. The reforms sought to change the customs related to personal hygiene and health as bases of the modern femininity, reduce the use of wet

24. Ver Jaime Jaramillo Araujo, “Una descripción inédita de Lima, de Hipólito Ruiz,” *Revista de Indias* IX:36 (1949): 262–63, 267–68.

25. Still, an important issue was how to control the social conduct of women in a city where traditionally they had ample prerogatives in their mobility and dressing (the famous *tapadas limeñas*). Limeño patriarchy can be found in the *Casa de Amparadas*, the disciplinary institution of *recogimiento* that fulfilled the functions of rectifying social and sexual transgressions of unruly elite women. See Nancy van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly: The Institutional and Cultural Practice of “Recogimiento” in Colonial Lima* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). For a similar case in Mexico, see Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, “Los peligros del mundo. Honor familiar y recogimiento femenino,” in *Los miedos en la historia*, eds. Elisa Speckman Guerra and Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru (México: El Colegio de México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009), 269–90.

26. For a questioning of this claim that included women of all the castes and statuses, see Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015); Richard E. Boyer, “Honor Among Plebeians. Mala Sangre and Social Reputation,” in *The Faces of Honor*, eds. Johnson and Lipsett-Rivera (1998), 152–78; Richard Chuhue, “Plebe, prostitución y conducta sexual en el siglo XVIII. Apuntes sobre la sexualidad en Lima borbónica,” in *Historia de Lima. XVII Coloquio de Historia de Lima, 2010*, eds. Miguel Maticorena et al. (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Centro Cultural de San Marcos, 2010), 127–51; Adolfo Gustavo Tantaléan Valiente, “Injurias contra el honor,” Lima, siglo XVIII (master thesis in History, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2018); Maribel Arreluca Barrantes, *Sobreviviendo a la esclavitud. Negociación y honor en las prácticas cotidianas de los africanos y afrodescendientes. Lima, 1750-1820* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2018); and Sarah Albiez-Wieck et al., coords., *El que no tiene de inga, tiene de mandinga. Honor y mestizaje en los mundos americanos* (Madrid-Frankfurt: Iberoamericana, Vervuert, 2020).

nurses, and establish the role of elite women in the education of future citizens whose main objective was the political transformation of society.²⁷

THE NOBLE BUSINESSWOMAN

By the second part of the 1790s, Lima must have been a city full of anxieties for the elites who saw their privileged situation jeopardized. The women who kept some resources resorted to a small range of economic activities as entrepreneurs to continue to live “nobly” from their secure rents: supply (candle shops, bakeries), loans, purchase of enslaved people to generate daily wages (*jornaleros*), etc.²⁸

One of the ways to avoid falling into ruin and, hence, poverty is quite clear from the movement of capital from trade to productive activities under the protection of state and/or municipal institutions. Certainly, entrepreneurs at risk looked to be protected by political entities through special licenses to practice under exclusive monopolistic conditions. Indeed, affected by the reforms, merchants and officeholders relocated their remaining resources into secure mass-consumption manufacturing activities such as candle making and bakeries. Thus, among the fifty-one applicants to open candle shops in Lima from 1799 to 1822, there were fourteen women (eleven of them *doñas*); likewise, among the thirty-two applicants to open bakeries and pastry shops in Lima from 1756 to 1822, there were four women (three of them *doñas*).²⁹

On the other hand, an “honest” way of obtaining, maximizing, or preserving resources was to invest in buying enslaved workers to secure a living through a wage regime known as “*jornal*.” Limeño enslaved wage earners (*jornaleros*) had to provide their slave holders a daily rent equivalent to one *real* per each hundred pesos of his or her current market price (0.125 percent). In actuality, the vast majority of the ten thousand enslaved people in the city in the eighteenth century labored under this regime that allowed both male and

27. Mariselle Meléndez and Claudia Rosas relate the increasing concern about women with new enlightened visions by the end of the eighteenth century. See Mariselle Meléndez, “Inconsistencia en la mujer. Espacio y cuerpo femenino en el Mercurio Peruano, 1791-1794,” *Revista Iberoamericana*, LXVII, 194–95 (2001): 79–88; and Claudia Rosas Lauro, “Educando al bello sexo: la mujer en el discurso ilustrado,” in *El Perú en el siglo XVIII. La era borbónica*, comp. Scarlett O’Phelan Godoy (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1999), 369–413; “Jaqué a la dama: La imagen de la mujer en la prensa limeña de fines del siglo XVIII,” in *Mujeres y género en la historia del Perú*, ed. Margarita Zegarra (Lima: CENDOC-Mujer, 1999), 143–204; and “Damas de sociedad y varones ilustrados. Mujeres, hombres y género en el discurso modernizador de la ilustración a fines del siglo XVIII,” in *Género y mujeres en la historia del Perú*, ed. Claudia Rosas Lauro, 203–28. For contemporary Spain, see Mónica Bolufer, *Mujeres e ilustración. La construcción de la femineidad en la ilustración española* (Valencia: Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 1998).

28. Alfonso W. Quiroz, *Crédito, inversión y políticas en el Perú entre los siglos XVIII y XX* (Lima: Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, 2017).

29. For these and other references to elite and nonelite women as entrepreneurs and workers at the end of the colonial period in Lima, see Francisco Quiroz Chueca, *Artisanos y manufactureros en Lima colonial*, 178–82.

female enslaved people to lead a life of semi-liberty, as long as they earned enough money to pay the rent (*jornal*) to his or her master, and also take over all his or her personal and family's expenses (room, food, clothing, health). Among the owners of enslaved wage winners were several widows and single women living from what their enslaved gave them every day. The precariousness of this activity can be seen in frequent situations where one to three enslaved jornaleros provided the sustenance for the whole family of the master and, in fact, the family depended thoroughly on the control over enslaved jornaleros. The fragility of the rent then was also related to potential illness, death, or flight of the wage earner, or simply delays in the payment of daily wages. The alternative variant of this system was to rent out the enslaved, for in this case the owner maintains control of the enslaved by collecting the wages him- or herself, but the master must still provide a job to his or her enslaved worker. In contrast, the jornalero looked for his work by him- or herself and was responsible for paying the rent even on the days he or she could not get a job.³⁰

SHAMEFACED ELITE WOMEN AT WORK

According to the proposals made by the Creole elites, the main labor issues for Spanish women were the social stigmatization of menial work and the necessity to find activities according to their social status and prestige to preserve their honor and avoid falling into prostitution.³¹ Those women who lacked resources faced a more desperate situation because their social condition did not allow

30. The *jornalero* system worked in this way: if the market price of a semiskilled *jornalero* was, for example, 400 pesos, the enslaved person had to pay his or her master 4 reales a day. If the enslaved received a daily income of 1 peso (8 reales), in actuality a payment above average in the city, then he or she could keep the other 4 reales for himself or herself. However, the enslaved had to pay his or her master for all the working days, and also had to attend to his or her personal and family needs every day. That is to say, working on average 200 days a year, and paying rent to a master for those working days, the enslaved in this example and his or her family must live 365 days with little more than 2 reales a day. In fact, the situation of the day-laborers was not easy, and this hardship explains both the irregularity of the payment of rent (*jornal*) to the most vulnerable masters (first of all, widowed and abandoned women who had troubles to enforce the obligation) and the anxiety in which the enslaved wage earners lived. A common case in documentation shows the dire situation in which masters and jornaleros lived at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For instance, in November 1805, the African-born, enslaved Black man Francisco Herrera was arrested at the bakery on Animitas street by order of his mistress for owing her the equivalent of two weeks' *jornales*. Instead of waiting for the physical punishment, he killed the first enslaved man he found among the prisoners placed at the bakery by their respective masters, precisely to ensure payment of the jornales with their work there. As in other similar cases, the jornaleros preferred going to jail rather than working in a bakery (AGN. Real audiencia. Causas criminales, File 105, cuadernillo 1278. Other similar cases occurred in the same years, in Files 98 cuadernillos 1206 and 1207; File 107 cuadernillo 1293 File 108 cuadernillo 1307; and File 125 cuadernillo 1527). For the conditions of the wage system in American cities, see Francisco Quiroz, "Historia de muchas ciudades: esclavitud urbana en las Américas," Dossidè História Afro-Latino-Americana, *RELEA. Revista Latino-Americana de Estudos Avançados* 1, 1 (Jan./Jun., 2016): 29–45.

31. José Ignacio de Lequanda, "Discurso sobre el destino que debe darse a la gente vaga que tiene Lima"; Lequanda, "Idea succinta del comercio del Perú y medios de prosperarlo con una noticia general de sus producciones," in Roxanne Cheesman, *El Perú de Lequanda: Economía y comercio a fines del siglo XVIII* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Fundación M.J. Bustamante de la Fuente, 2011), 628.

them to leave home to work or go to the large factory in Lima at that time. Despite the Bourbon declaration of the honorability of work in 1783, elite women had to take on work in their own houses (or the houses of peers), enter the poor house, or ask the archbishop for help by declaring themselves in either of these last two cases poor of solemnity.

Sewing was an activity shared by women of all castes and social groups. However, it was carried out under different conditions. Women of the popular sectors had no social impediment to work with their hands in public with the needle, the *batea* (pan, washing vessel), as vendors in the marketplace, or even as laborers in workshops and factories. In contrast, sewing was practically the only honorable way of working for women of the social elite. They were engaged in the work of sewing and embroidering garments to help with their domestic economy and fill their lives with an interesting and profitable activity, which for them was not a menial trade but an “art” done inside their homes. However, when the Bourbon changes affected the economy of the household and/or the male breadwinner disappeared, this activity went on to become the main way to obtain resources for the household. Indeed, as we are arguing in relation to social restrictions for the labor of white elite women, it depended on the activity and on the workplace because there were activities that they could perform only in private settings, inside their houses.

Thus, there were few laboring alternatives for impoverished elite women. In addition to the activities proscribed because they were proper for men or for women of the popular sectors, the main restriction for upper-class women was the workplace. The fear of losing the social consideration they enjoyed prevented them from working outside the familiar household. Therefore, certain income generating work was “hidden” in the private sphere of the household, in the interior rooms far from view from the street and unexpected visitors. They worked along with other girls and female adults of the same condition (relatives, neighbors, friends), but also maids and servants. The logic of paternalistic protection included the extended use of skilled but unpaid labor of servants and other persons aggregated to the household for the benefit of the family. Thus, to have a populated seignorial house (*casa poblada*) was not only synonymous with economic and social status, but it also meant the possibility to add members of the extended family to the productive market-oriented activities developed in the interior of the house. To be sure, the Limeño urban household was far from being an *obraje* or a large textile workshop. It almost always had, notwithstanding, some wheels and looms.³²

32. The accountant Lequanda proposed that the Spanish women who worked in their own homes making cigars, embroidering, sewing cloths, making bottoms, cordons, and ribbons were taking away these activities from men. He

TOBACCO IN FEMALE HANDS

The increased consumption of tobacco throughout the eighteenth century favored the establishment of cigarette shops in Lima to create products to export to various cities in South America. Around 1747, there were sixty-one small- and medium-sized cigar workshops, with an average of five workers, although one of them had twenty, all men. Five years later, in 1752, the colonial government established the state monopoly on tobacco sales, acquiring the raw material from one of the sixteen tobacco shops. The production of cigars and *limpiones* spread to grocery stores and private houses of rich and poor people. By 1780, there were 121 workers across all the cigar shops.

But in 1780, things changed when the colonial state assumed both the production and sale of cigars, thus preventing the work of numerous people in their own houses and cigar shops. The state monopoly founded tobacco factories in the cities of Lima and Trujillo. The Lima factory accepted workers from the previous cigar shops and four years later it already had 150, and three more years later, 442 more, both men and women. At the beginning, Lima factory did not have many female workers and until 1784 there were only 39 white, older women enrolled at the poorhouse but also from the beggars that used to be in front of the numerous churches of the city; in 1787, there were, however, 155 female workers (114 Spanish, 28 *mestizas*, and 13 mulattas) and 287 male workers. Finally, in 1790, the number of female workers rose to 216, in one factory that also housed 347 male workers.³³

That last year, viceroy Gil de Taboada Lemos closed the factory as a result of the protest of high- and middle-class families. However, at the same time the colonial government established fixed prices inaccessible to the poor. The end of the factory and the liberation of tobacco, then, affected the truly poor of the city

added that they could do it “at home, thus giving exercise to their own maids, who are regularly idling.” The maids could also sell the cigars in the store or in the street, if modesty and nobility prevented the ladies from doing so. The women could sew suits as in other countries, “leaving the scissors to the men and reserving the needle for themselves,” differentiating between tailors and seamstresses. Curiously enough, his suggestion would be taken into account by the authorities, the businessmen, and the women themselves. For a related case in early modern England, see Sara Horrel, Jane Humphries, and Jacob Weisdorf, “Family Standards of Living Over the Long Run, England 1250-1850,” *Past & Present* 250, no.1 (2021): 85–134.

33. Among white women in 1787 were some *doñas*, such as Melchora Herrera, Manuela Rivero, Mercedes Aliaga, and Ventura Vargas (future applicant for alms from the archbishop in 1806, AAL, Pobres, App. 441). On the sale of cigars and *limpiones* in late colonial Lima, see Diego Lévano Medina, “Artesanos del humo. El gremio de cigarreros y limpioneros de Lima en el siglo XVIII,” *Revista del Archivo General de la Nación* 29 (2014): 103–39; on the tobacco monopoly and the Limeño factory, see Catalina Vizcarra, “Markets and Hierarchies in Late Colonial Spanish America: The Royal Tobacco Monopoly in the Viceroyalty of Peru, 1752-1813,” *The Journal of Economic History* 63, no.2 (Jun 2003): 541–45; and Carlos Morales Cerón, “Mercantilismo y crecimiento económico en el virreinato del Perú. La organización del estanco del tabaco. Lima, 1750-1800” (unpublished master thesis in History, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2015), quotations, 195–98, 226–34.

who did not have the resources to buy bundles of tobacco in the tobacconists. But it benefited the families of the elites who returned to produce cigars and *limpiones*.³⁴

The Creole scientist Hipólito Unanue stressed in 1792 that the monopoly (*estanco*) of tobacco took economic activities from the poor and, especially, from women. Despite his references to the “poor,” in reality, Unanue advocated elite families who obtained important resources thanks to their own domestic work and that of their servants. He said that,

“All know that Peru is one of the countries on the world with least resources for the subsistence of poor people. Since from Europe come manufactured from shoes to cap, it remains very little to do in industrial matters for the *Peruleros* [Peruvians]. Tobacco used to provide livelihood to numerous families not just in Lima but throughout the kingdom. A needy head of household obtained some tobacco for just a short price and transformed it into cigars with the help of his children finding in its sale the means of subsistence.”³⁵

After the closure of the tobacco factory, then, the families of the social elite in economic difficulties faced the situation thanks to the expansion of cigars, sewing, and embroidery. However, these activities encountered problems due to competition among the same families (disproportionate supply) and market saturation due to textile imports.

*Vivimos de la aguja*³⁶

Needlework and embroidery were the most important occupations of white women working at home. To some extent, needlework was synonymous with female work (for upper-class women). Initially a noneconomic, domestic activity for well-to-do women, by the second half of the eighteenth century, working as a seamstress was increasingly used as a complement to other income for the household. In this line of work, the workers did not receive wages. Rather, they were paid by the piece as the product was sold. The pieces were sold both within a wide network of kin and friendship locally, and also out of the city when the merchants were involved in the business providing raw

34. Factory work was organized by tasks (piecework) that demanded 10 to 12 hours of work per day. In addition to the exploitation and physical abuse, the regime imposed in the factory seemed more like a prison than a productive center. That harsh reality generated a violent protest by the workers in 1784. All this prevented the women of the elite from going to work there. Morales Cerón, “Mercantilismo y crecimiento económico,” 211, 270, 275.

35. Hipólito Unanue, “Disertación sobre la naturaleza y efectos del tabaco adornada con una breve idea del origen y progresos del real estanco de Lima,” *Mercurio peruano* [1792], t. IV, 47–48 (author’s translation).

36. “We live on the needle.” In fact, this was the working title of the first version of this article.

materials and paying for the final products. Women who earned a living through this activity were still considered honorable women. Orphaned Spanish girls were taught sewing as part of their apprenticeship so that they would be prepared to earn an honest living.³⁷

Thanks to the information in the applications to ecclesiastical charities, we get important details of these activities that left almost no other historical records. Many of the applicants (or their representatives) state that sewing was the only means they had to survive: “live by the needle”; “live in the shadow of the needle”; “supports herself with this personal work”; “supported by the work of her weary hands”; “supports herself only by her sewing”; and the like.³⁸

At the same time, the applications manifested social, ethnic, and gender criteria. Sewing was considered a female activity (*trabajo mujeril*). Reaffirming this, the widow doña María Zavala said that she belongs to “the weak and useless sex,” as it is argued that their social status does not allow them to do any other activity than the “sad seam” (“*triste costura*”), that their honor as women of the white elite is not undermined by *el ingenio de coser* (the “wit of sewing”), and that sewing is the only thing a woman can aspire to as “proper trade of the sexso” (sic). Doña Jacoba Bardales, widow of don Juan González, pointed out that “there would be other means accessible to survive had she not dedicated to sewing, which is the only entertainment allowed for [her] sex in the country,” but what she actually obtained was barely enough “to not lose her life because of [its] necessity and bitterness.” On her side, doña Andrea Fructoso, a native of Guayaquil, pointed out that when she was abandoned in this city after the death of her son, she had “to support herself (. . .) [with] the very short utility that sewing could afford her, and other occupations typical of a lady of honor and recollection.” Very expressive was the widow doña María de la Maza when

37. The “needle” and other activities of clothing in private homes were recognized on several occasions by colonial authorities as a very small-scale activity. In 1684, viceroy Duque de la Plata exempted women who made handrails in their homes from paying the *alcabala* commercial tax; this exoneration was ratified in 1714 and 1733 by viceroy Castelfuerte, at the request of a large group of handrail makers and female silk makers, led by doña Martina de Aparicio (thirty-nine handrail makers “doñas” and five silk makers “doñas,” among them). In 1781, a new female trade was included in this list: the *manteras* or shawl makers. They were exonerated from paying taxes by the authorities because of the insignificant amounts of products they made (AGN. Real Tribunal del Consulado, File 115; AGN. Real Tribunal del Consulado, File 7; AGN, H-3, cuadernillo 1031, fols. 1–58).

38. AAL, Pobres. Examples taken from Apps. 23, 56, 69, 89, 90, 96, 208, 232, 664, 684, 694, 724, 758, 773, and 917. Health problems were among the circumstances that were not covered because there was no social welfare system. In particular, the applicants underlined their difficulties to sew. For instance, doña Bárbara Pérez y Herrera, doña Mercedes del Pozo, doña Brígida Robles, doña Agustina Sotomayor, and doña María Magdalena de Echarri y Javier explained that due to health troubles they could not work with the needle anymore. Examples taken from AAL, Pobres, Apps. 96, 129, 172, 173, 233, and 359. Other examples of women who ask for help “while the death comes” as one of them manifested, in AAL, Pobres, Apps. 12, 18, 27, 41, 82, 140, 143, 159, 160, 178, 191, 195, 208, 209, 221, 224, 235, 244, 256, 265, 266, 272, 282, 290, 296, 314, 336, 694, 758.

she pointed out that she had been left “heiress of nothing” when her husband died.³⁹

Yet, needlework was far from being an activity that provided sufficient earnings for making a living by the end of the colonial period in Lima. For example, in 1807, while living in the poorhouse, Dorotea and Jacinta Ferrer stated that they sought in vain a job as seamstresses in private houses, although “as it is evident women’s work is not enough and cannot provide for subsistence in such an expensive city as Lima.” Doña Bernardina del Castillo y Lozada was even more direct and eloquent in pointing out that, her parents having died, she dedicated her time to sewing to support herself, but that at the time of writing the petition it was impossible for her to continue doing so because there are no orders due to the great poverty that existed in the city, and that all the impoverished women were dedicated to sewing.⁴⁰

39. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 68 and 111. Quotation from Pobres, App. s.n. Specific quotations from AAL, Pobres, App. 180 (case of Bardales) and App. 813 (case of Fructoso). “Trabajo mujeril” quoted in an unnumbered application made by three sisters Ferrer of May 1807. Other common expressions in the applications are: “Continuous needle work to sustain the honor and virtue corresponding to her decent birth” (AAL, Pobres, App. 50); “At the expense of the work of seam that all sensible persons engage in this city” (AAL, Pobres, App. 90); she “destined herself to the hard exercise of sewing to be able to provide in some way for the relief of my many emergencies without detriment to my notorious honor and orderly conduct” (AAL, Pobres, App. 92); “Without further help but the little needlework I am asked to perform” (AAL, Pobres, App. 7); “The very small earnings from needlework were crucial to survive” (AAL, Pobres, App. 11); “Sad seam that comes at time to time” (AAL, Pobres, App. 56); “Although she makes efforts with the needle, there are not always orders” (AAL, Pobres, App. 65); three single sisters that “subsist due to the short aid from daily and tireless work of their hands” (AAL, Pobres, App. 68); she maintains her son “at the expense of her sweat” (AAL, Pobres, App. 134); “I just stay off the needle” (AAL, Pobres, App. 94); she “supports her daughter with the wit to sew” (AAL, Pobres, App. 99); she “lives only on the needle” (AAL, Pobres, App. 116); “She has supported herself at the expense of the sewing work provided to her noble lineage, although the expression blushes her” (AAL, Pobres, App. 119); “Her work of my needle is so short that it is barely enough for the subsistence of both [she and her daughter]” (AAL, Pobres, App. 150); “She supports herself with the industry of her hands, which does not even pay for the precise sustenance of her life” (AAL, Pobres, App. 151); “Honest daughters unable to take a state due to their notorious poverty and orphanhood. Without other means to feed themselves than those of their personal work, which in this city due to lack of [labor] destinations are not even enough for the precise food” (AAL, Pobres, App. 167); “The short food I eat every day I get with a hard work” (AAL, Pobres, App. 170); “Seamstress because it is the only entertainment allowed for [my] sex in the country, barely enough to not lose your life due to the impulses of necessity and bitterness” (AAL, Pobres, App. 180); “She eats on the scarce product of her seams, which, as her forces are limited and works are not found on all occasions, despite the exquisite and continuous diligence that she practices in their request, she suffers in cash from the sterilities (. . .)” (AAL, Pobres, App. 182). For other explicit similar references, see applications 5, 7, 11, 12, 18, 20, 47, 50, 54, 56, 65, 80, 81, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 99, 103, 104, 116, 119, 140, 144, 145, 150, 151, 153, 159, 160, 166, 167, 170, 171, 172, 173, 180, 181, 182, 188, 204, 206, 232, 235, 256, 263, 266, 279, 282, 301, 302, 314, 319, 330, 333, 352, 352, 353, 354, 358, 359, 369, 373, 375, 684, 385, 684, 721, 729, 758, 779, 793, 816, 822, 917, 934, and two unnumbered applications.

40. Several applicants introduced themselves in the following terms: “The seam that is barely enough to feed her and her daughter”; “it is useless to sew because of the poverty in the city and all women sew now” (AAL, Pobres, App. 18). Indeed, eighty-five applicants stated that seam was the principal means of surviving of their families, adding that by the beginning of the nineteenth century this was not enough to make a living. Other similar expressions show the situation: “The needlework of all of them was no longer enough because nobody orders even a shirt” (AAL, Pobres, App. 20); she survives only “thanks to a sad seam, and even now it is very scarce because of the numerous practitioners of this trade” (AAL, Pobres, App. 54); “My sewing work is not enough” (AAL, Pobres, App. 103); “Personal sewing work, not enough” (AAL, Poor, App. 104); “Total inability to devote herself to the ministry of sewing” (AAL, Pobres, App. 173); “What I earn with my sewing does not even afford me enough to eat” (AAL, Pobres, App. 181); “The industry and personal work of the supplicant is not enough to acquire what is necessary in this country to provide for

Thus, numerous elite women declared that they used to be seamstresses, but now this activity did not provide a living wage, and this was enough reason for them to justify their request to various charities.

LIMA, A LARGE TEXTILE FACTORY

Given this situation, the attempt to establish large-scale textile factories by important merchants and landowners, belonging to the highest colonial nobility, was a way of solving many of the problems that afflicted them as entrepreneurs and, especially, the city impoverished elites. These cases have a very close relationship with the main theme of this study, because the improvised businessmen resorted to the euphemism of charity in favor of the social sectors disadvantaged by fortune. The idea was to enable the houses or hospices for the poor to be used as textile factories.

Various efforts were made in late colonial Lima to establish textile factories disguised as poorhouses. These were places where genteel white women of aristocratic but poor families could spin cotton, weave wool, and sew clothes. The poorhouse established in 1760 by the philanthropist don Diego Ladrón de Guevara, was administered by the archdiocese.⁴¹

This circumstance restricted the use of the poorhouse as a factory. But the noblemen and merchants of Lima looked for an alternative and, perhaps in their despair, they decided to pursue an even larger enterprise. Indeed, in the last year of the eighteenth century, a group of noble merchants and landowners in Lima who had lost important positions with the commercial reforms, devised a way to compensate for the losses through the start-up of a textile factory. For this purpose, in February 1799, they asked permission of viceroy Ambrosio O'Higgins for establishing a textile factory of significant proportions, which, to avoid colonial restrictions and prohibitions, they presented as a charitable project for the poor. In fact, the formal intention was to found "schools of spinning cotton, linen and hemp" to help the poor white women who sewed and spun in their own houses because their elevated social status prevented them from working outside. To be sure, the elite Limeño

her precise needs and the education of her children" (AAL, Pobres, App. 188). Quotation of doña Bernardina's say in AAL, Pobres, App. s.n.

41. Archivo Histórico Municipal de Lima, Libros de Cédulas y Provisiones de Lima, Libro 22 fols. 382v–383v; and Libro 28 fol. 160. Diego Ladrón de Guevara, *Excelentísimo señor don Diego Ladrón de Guevara, puesto a los pies de V.E. con el más profundo rendimiento, dice que el conocimiento y experiencia que tiene de los gravísimos daños que resultan de permitirse el grande numero de mendicantes*. . . (Lima, 1757?). See also, Chuhue Huamán, "La piedad ilustrada y los "necesitados" en Lima borbónica."

entrepreneurs considered vagrants of all social and ethnic origins as potential workers of the newly created Sociedad de Beneficencia Pública, a “political patriotic instructional project” (as the business was euphemistically called). The noble Limeño merchants justified their singular request indicating that:

“[B]ecause of the large number of poor *vecinos* [citizens], especially the women, who without leaving their homes suffer from the greatest rigor of misery. . . the majority are of ability and who, despite their good wishes, regret their sad situation because in this capital there is no work that they can perform. The fact is quite notorious and it rises to the point that we recollect that when the factory of cigars was practiced on behalf of the king, women came in droves to be preferred in this kind of work. It would take too long to refer the cases referred to with the experience in which they persistently request, especially those of the Spanish class, to dedicate themselves to sewing even without yielding them even for what is precise.”

The two alternatives at hand were to establish a centralized factory in the Foundling House in the indigenous borough of El Cercado, or to transform the whole city into a decentralized factory based on the domestic labor of women and children in a classical output system. In fact, the enterprise used both alternatives. The factory began to produce immediately in the Foundling House and in numerous houses of the city, while the project was sent to Spain for what they thought it must be its final approval. This project—the biggest and the most sophisticated entrepreneurial initiative of the Limeño aristocracy of *Amantes del país*—however, was to last only a short time because in September 1803, the Royal Council of the Indies rejected it and ordered the viceroy to close the factory.⁴²

42. The arguments displayed are coincidental with those expressed in the *Mercurio Peruano* by Lequanda and Unanue in articles mentioned above. The founders of the “textile schools” were representatives of the Lima aristocracy and commerce, such as the marquis de Celada de la Fuente, José Robledo (director); Manuel Villar (military order of Santiago, vice-director); Antonio Álvarez del Villar (accountant); count of Fuente González José González de la Fuente (military order of Santiago, treasurer); Matías de Larreta (registrar); Miguel Manuel de Arrieta, Antonio de Elizalde (military order of Santiago), Juan Bautista Sarrao and Francisco Vázquez de Uzieda (deputies and distributors of raw materials to collect them in thread); José González de la Fuente and José Hermenegildo de Isasi (commissioned for the distribution of the yarns to the weavers until they are picked up by manufacturers); José Hipólito Ibáñez and Martín de Osambela (commissioned for the collection of raw materials). Likewise, they appointed as deputies of the Cercado hospice house Sebastián de Aliaga, Matías de la Cuesta (military order of Santiago), marquis of San Miguel (order of Charles III), José Matías de Elizalde, marquis of Fuente Hermosa, Javier María de Aguirre (order of Charles III), José Antonio de Errea, and Miguel Rodríguez (AGN, Superior gobierno 1799, leg. 30 cuadernillo 940 fols. 1–61). The prospectus of the society was published as *Proyecto instructivo, patriótico-político, sobre el establecimiento de escuelas de hilar y texer el algodón, lino y cáñamo, para fomentar la industria entre las gentes pobres de ambos sexos de la capital de Lima que promueve el zelo de varios ilustres vecinos, amantes del país, en obsequio del bien público y alivio de la indigente humanidad* (Lima: Imprenta Real de los Niños Huérfanos, 1799).

It is interesting to note that in terms of industrial training and productive incentives in Spain, neither came to fruition. Following the guidelines of the adviser of the reforms, the count of Campomanes, Spanish crown encouraged the creation of *escuelas-talleres* (schools-workshops) where girls and women would learn trades related to clothing. The schools-workshops managed to create a very large group of specialists in Spanish cities at the end of the eighteenth century.⁴³

The failure of the Limeño factory, then, put people of all sorts in a more difficult situation. Precariousness would be the norm for the living conditions of the genteel families, a good share of them headed solely by women. Now they must have to rely on other kinds of work for living, and this was precisely what elite members considered shameful. It may not be surprising that the alternative was now to ask for alms to the archdiocese, although the aid was very small and this obliged them to declare themselves publicly “solemnly poor.” In a city that claimed to be white and noble, this decision was very difficult, as can be seen in the applications submitted and, in particular, those that have been preserved in the archive. Proud elite women were forced to resort to poor relief.

CLAIMANTS FOR MEAGER ALMS

The solemnly poor constituted a special group that claimed help by virtue of certain conditions that they held mainly due to their social position (“quality”) and also to their gender. The dishonor did not originate in poverty but in dedicating themselves to some activities that, due to their social status, were off limits to them. For this reason, in the petitions, they were grateful that the Church granted aid for poor people of quality in such confused times to alleviate the situation of “the poor shamefaced ladies who confidently trust in the liberal and pious hand of your honor,” as they referred to the archbishop. In times of acute crisis for them, to be on the archbishop’s poor list was the only way to face the economic constraints of poverty without losing decency.⁴⁴

The aid granted not only benefited the claimants, the entire family group was also to be helped. However, the assistance provided by the Church was very modest,

43. For the Madrileño experience with the schools-workshops, see Victoria López Barahona, *Las trabajadoras en la sociedad madrileña del siglo XVIII* (Madrid: ACCI Editores, 2016).

44. Among the most common arguments offered in the requests are: “My privileged and meritorious state”; “Not being able to expose myself to begging for being a decent person”; “She says that her quality, sex and age do not allow her to beg”; “Because of my quality and circumstances I cannot use the help of asking for alms” in the streets and churches (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 9, 80, 89, 108, 116, 159, 208, 369, 408).

and a former well-to-do person must have had to be in great need of aid to publicly declare himself or herself to be shamefaced and poor, and to go to the convents and monasteries for the meager ration of soup distributed there for charity.

In reality, from the few cases where amounts of money are mentioned, we know that the alms were only two to three *pesos* a month, an amount that could help to just barely avoid starvation. At best the ecclesiastical alms were similar to the amount of money formally received by an indigenous compulsory worker called a *mitayo* for his work in mines, textile workshops (*obrajes*), *haciendas*, or other activities under enforced conditions. For example, doña Rosa de León, widow of don Melchor del Solar, received from the former archbishop González de la Reguera a monthly pension of two *pesos*. Because she was not able to sew any more, she asked for a higher amount. In another example, three pesos was the allowance received during three years by the widow doña Melchora León de Isla Albu. The widow doña Evarista Pino received also three pesos per month.⁴⁵

Neither poverty nor physical handicap were enough to make one eligible for aid. Eligibility depended on noneconomic factors too. In addition to economic difficulties, destitute women had to demonstrate that they deserved the aid. One of the unavoidable and specific conditions to get the aid was *recato*, or demureness. Female applicants must be *doncellas* (virgins, maiden) and reserved if single, and in general *de estado honesto* (of honorable status). Indeed, except for ten cases, all supplicants used the “doña” noble prefix to their names even when it may not have applied to them.⁴⁶

Virtually all petitions to be declared solemnly poor and receive the ecclesiastical allowance include a statement of having a demure lifestyle. Appropriate sexual behavior was considered a guarantee of correctness according to the social rules and therefore was among the requirements of eligibility for relief. Two examples about these conditions (single maiden and widow) may illustrate the situation of applicants. Doña Carmen Ruiz, a fifteen-year-old maiden, pointed out that she had lost her father six years before, and since then, she and her mother had lived in poverty. She told the archbishop that, despite the hardships, she had maintained a demure behavior, she attended mass in the

45. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 8, 107, 124, 324.

46. One of the ten cases is that of María del Carmen Torres. Her application included her mother and sister; “who many times were busy with a *batea* [pan or washing vessel] and other times with the elaboration of some cigars to sustain us and if it were not for a bite that was sent to us out of charity, our fatigues would be even greater.” She was endorsed by her spiritual director but a washerwoman belongs to popular sectors of society and, hence, it was difficult to consider her among the deserved women. Actually, she does not apply the “doña” prefix to her name, perhaps recognizing her plebeian origin. Another divergent case was that of the Mendoza sisters and their mother, because they were orphans of a natural father. However, they were in the list of the poor of the previous archbishop (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 220, 273).

parish of San Sebastián, and requested the help “to be able to subsist in her honorable life and state.” On her side, doña Juana León, a “modest widow” who lived in the *Casa de las Pobres*, wrote to the new archbishop asking him to “count her among the shameful ones who should deserve this benefit from your lordship.”⁴⁷

To be sure, virtuous behavior was not the heritage only of Spanish and Creole women. Indigenous, free Black, and mestizo or caste women assumed the model, although they were not expected to comply with it. The model was based on the ideal of *recogimiento* that women should maintain, which was not possible for women from popular sectors, whose economic and labor circumstances forced them to have continuous contact with public life.

Applicants had to impact the ecclesiastical authorities. Their speech had to be convincing. Thus, the claimants show their lived experiences, probably with exaggerations but not enough to consider them fictional or unauthentic. In the end, the declaration of the parish priests and other ecclesiastical officials was fundamental in the acceptance or rejection of the petition because they knew each of the applicants personally.⁴⁸

THE CASES

The analysis of the more than one thousand applications for archiepiscopal aid made by impoverished elite women of Lima provides a general picture of the conditions under which an important part of the city elite lived by the end of the colonial period. The applications were submitted in November and December of 1806, when the new archbishop of Lima, Bartolomé María de las Heras (1806–21) was inaugurated and wanted to verify the real necessity of the new supplicants as well as those persons helped by his predecessor Juan Domingo González de la Reguera (1788–1805).

In fact, the already impressive figure of 1,066 applications for financial help does not show the complete picture. To begin with, the file includes the applications of the new requests and of those who understood that they should be ratified because they were listed with the previous archbishop. The second part of the file is a simple list with no text of the argumentation.

47. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 200, 220, 326 and 329.

48. A good example of a recommendation made by ecclesiastical officials is found in the five applications nos. 549–553, where women maidens were recommended by their priests confessors, their godparents. The presbyter Manuel Barrera had at least four beatae gathered in his house under his protection (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 261, 304, 333, 549–553, 709, 755, 914 y 915).

Interestingly, only six applications were made by men, which could be explained by the social embarrassment for a man to declare himself a pauper in a patriarchal order.⁴⁹

All in all, there were 1,066 applications (one appears twice). This figure includes 478 widows, 516 maidens (*doncellas*, including 51 older single women), 53 married women, 18 women with children but with no specification about being married, and one divorced. In addition, applications were made by one person but on behalf of a family group or institution. Generally, an elderly single woman, a widow, or an abandoned or orphaned woman asked for alms for herself and her sons and daughters, and/or young single sisters and brothers, or equally needy elderly parents. Thus, the 1,060 women and six men involved other persons: 287 single daughters, 283 minor sons, seven granddaughters, two grandsons, 24 sisters, three aunts, 46 mothers, fourteen fathers, two godmothers, eight nieces, one goddaughter, two stepdaughters, and two servant girls. In sum, there were 1,448 women and 305 males, or 1,753 persons in total in need belonging to the upper and middle social groups.

In addition, to that huge figure, we must add five cases referring in general about “daughters,” 17 cases mentioning in general “sons,” and 83 cases alluding to “children” with no specifications about their number or sex. That is to say, 105 applications (about 10 percent of all requests), include an unspecified number of children and therefore the actual amount is even higher than the 1,753 people registered. Moreover, the application of sister María Catalina was made on behalf of the whole Franciscan community of nuns.⁵⁰

If taking into account only women, the figures disclose an unknown social reality of Lima in the late colonial period: between one-fourth and one-fifth of the white female population declared themselves officially poor.

The main source of this study talks about a different structure of families and households in late colonial Lima, shown in demographic censuses. It reveals the often-overlooked household alternative to the male-breadwinner model: a female-headed family unit. The nuclear family unit was far from being the

49. Yet, it is interesting that at least one of those six men justified his case by pointing out the importance of economic aid as a means to protect the honor of women. Indeed, Juan Crisóstomo Maeda asked the archbishop for help to support his two maiden daughters who, being sickly, could not dedicate themselves to sewing. So far, he said, some friends had helped him with food. In addition, Maeda himself, requested years before, in 1794, monthly alms for his mother, who had stopped working in sewing because she had partially lost her vision, and for his two maiden sisters who were previously helped by the priest Nicolás Calderón, their spiritual father. Another witness to their illnesses and poverty is the missionary Fray José Sánchez. Juan’s request was unsuccessful, and he was told that the number of poor people that the church helped monthly was complete (AAL, Pobres, App. 372. Another case in App. 308).

50. AAL, Pobres, App. 161.

standard of the rich in the city; common households included several relative persons with real and spiritual bonds, organized around a female head. However, occupation information for women is not common in demographic censuses, where most women appear labelled only as housewives.

Among the claimants were wives, daughters, and widows of noblemen and members of military orders or lawyers, judges, bureaucrats, merchants, etc. For instance, doña Alberta Encalada, widow of the Count of Casa Dávalos, was among those who requested the help of the archbishop. As well as doña Manuela Torres y Ramos, legitimate daughter of the Marquis of Casa Torres and doña María Ramos, who in her petition indicated that she was poor and “without any help due to the lack of powers” (that is, resources) to which her family had been reduced, although her lineage is so clear that she is different from those women who may publicly beg. Doña María Magdalena de Echarri y Javier recalled in her request that her family had been one of “honor” in the capital city, that in another time had “brightness and splendor.” After the death of her husband and her father, and the death of her two daughter’s husbands, she received the help of her cousin, the Marquis of Salinas. When the marquis died, five years before her petition, she had been left in absolute poverty, unable to provide for her daughters or keep her two sons in college. Now lacking good health, she was no longer able to work with the *aguja* (needlework) “the only one industry of her sex and [social] quality” to provide for her family. Doña Josefa, doña Manuela Paula and doña Micaela Damiana de Arrese were the legitimate daughters of don Joaquín José de Arrese, knight of the order of Santiago, and doña Manuela Martín de Laiseca. They asked for help because their parents had died, and their two brothers had incomes of 800 and 500 pesos only and their own families to support. Don Manuel de Aragón e Ibáñez, retired officer assistant to the Real Felipe fortress in port El Callao, requested the help of the archbishop because he was blind and unable to work and must support his “large and honest family.” The report in his support written by the city council for the king, emphasizes that don Manuel was of a “distinguished extraction and illustrious family.”⁵¹

The poor of the plebeian sector were expected to be able to live on alms, while the poor of the elite had to take care of their social prestige. This situation prevented

51. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 76, 164, 205, 250, 277, 318, 357, 359, 518, 895. Petitioners were also linked to high-ranking figures in the military and in the political administration, such as the daughter of councilman Díaz de San Miguel, who had a relevant role in Lima in those years (AAL, Pobres, App. 424), or the great-niece of former archbishop Fernando Arias de Ugarte (AAL, Pobres, App. 636). Judging by the cases in which the occupation of the father, husband, brother, or son is specified, there was one large landowner, three lawyers of the Royal Court of Lima, two university professors, five large merchants, ten high-ranking military officers in the militia and several foreigners, such as Maulion, Boloñino, Barberi, Gerardino, Serciti and Dubois, in addition to the naval pilot (the Frenchman Captain Juan Bautista Basmeson) (AAL, Pobres, Apps. 61, 62, 110, 167, 174, 178 y 188).

them from asking for alms directly in the streets or at the door of a church and during processions. Consistent with this, social status is presented by several petitioners as a sufficient argument to obtaining financial aid. Petitioners from the social elites only stated that due to their social status (“quality”) they deserved the help of the archbishop. For example, the petition of doña Antonia Landaburu, widow of don Felipe Manzanilla, and of her daughter doña Gertrudis Manzanilla, underlined her widowhood and her obligation to take care of her family as the reasons why she had economic necessities that her “class and person” cannot permit being met by requesting food from door to door as “people of inferior quality” do, because they are “reduced to this kind of life.” In another example, doña Petronila Pasarín supported her request “because of my notorious quality and continuous suffering” that prevented her from finding another resource to be able to live honestly.

The case of the sisters doña Manuela and doña Felipa Márquez leads to a related issue of great importance in the Lima of those years: the poverty of the rich. In the first instance, they indicated that they had remained maidens, and next explained the cause of their poverty: over the years they had spent the goods they inherited from their parents. This situation had become more serious as a result of the death of some relatives who helped them, leaving them “reduced to the greatest poverty imaginable, since they have absolutely nothing to eat, finding themselves in the need (despite their distinguished class) asking for help from some persons to be able to sustain their lives with much affliction and anguish.”⁵²

Being a maiden was one of the basic conditions to be considered decent and, therefore, their belonging to the social elites was validated. Women from the popular sectors could be single, but this did not ensure that they were considered demure or decent in the social terms of the moment. Therefore, it is not surprising that women who, being neither married nor widowed, sought to avail themselves of archiepiscopal aid by presenting themselves as “maidens and virgins.” Almost half of the 1,060 applicants for ecclesiastical charity in 1806 were celibate women. Some examples highlight this situation. The main arguments presented by doña Gertrudis Manzanilla were that she was a maiden, orphaned, and had a “privileged and respectable status,” hoping to convince the archbishop to grant her help. For her part, doña Paula Cabezas, widow of don Juan Segundo Valencia, a colonial official, pointed out that she had enjoyed an allowance given by the previous archbishop for having kept “that honesty and recogimiento that Christian life demands, living (. . .) with that example resulting from the upbringing and doctrine with which she was

52. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 6, 9, 10, 14.

educated.” Doña Bernardina del Castillo y Lozada also presented herself as “a maiden poor girl, daughter of honest parents and of a more than regular birth.” Her parents, as she explained, had died, leaving her only debts and “good customs in which she was raised, in which she remains to this day exercising virtue and living in the holy fear of God.” She also pointed out that she had reached such an extreme level of poverty that in order to hear Mass she had to wait for a loan of somebody else’s dress (*saya*), which is why she could not attend Christian obligations as she wanted. For her part, doña María de Oyague y Sarmiento pointed out that she was a “helpless and honest widow” unable to support a maiden daughter.⁵³

Doña Paula Cabezas and doña Bernardina del Castillo draw our attention because they mention the religious issue. Despite going to church and, in certain cases, mentioning their priest or spiritual fathers, very few applicants emphasized being good Christians. Perhaps this is because the Christian practice was not a merit among non-indigenous people. Moreover, even the urban indigenous population was considered to be already Christianized by that time. An exception is that of the maiden doña Petronila Gárate, who declared herself a “collected and avid mystic.” Not all the letters of support and endorsement made by the parish priests and other ecclesiastic made reference to the religiosity of the applicants. For example, Father Villavicencio of the San Felipe Neri congregation focuses on how poor doña Manuela de Orellana was, without alluding to her pious practices.⁵⁴

Several female applicants actually had a male at home: a husband and/or father. To be sure, this statement meant acknowledging that husbands and fathers had failed in their role as protector and provider. The arguments they presented were that their men were impeded from being the protectors and providers because they were sick or physically handicapped. Only some indicated that their men were also solemnly poor. For example, doña Mariana Vásquez y Montenegro requested assistance for herself and her daughters, doña Juana and doña Gregoria Coronel. Doña Mariana, despite the fact that her husband was alive, was on the list of shameful poor since the time of the previous archbishop. The aid had been granted to her because her husband, don Vicente Coronel, had lost his job in the Royal Court and also suffered from various illnesses, and

53. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 9, 14, 18, 54, 55, 126, 171, 220, 264, 362.

54. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 155, 271. In actuality, to be Christian was not a criterion of differentiation between Spaniards and the rest of the population in the eighteenth century. Especially, in regard to the urban indigenous population of Lima; see Juan Carlos Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santidad: La incorporación de los indios del Perú al catolicismo, 1532-1750* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2003); and Teresa Vergara Ormeño, “The Copacabana Indigenous Elite: Formation, Identity and Negotiation (Lima, 1590-1767)” (unpublished PhD dissertation in History, University of Connecticut, 2018).

hence, they were in total abandonment, as what she and her daughters earned from sewing was not sufficient.⁵⁵

A new important topic is also evident from the files: the risk of falling into prostitution in late colonial Lima. Doña María Clavijo, a maiden from Lima, pointed out that since 1795, when her father, don José Clavijo, senior official of the tobacco *estanco* in Lima, died, she was left in misery. But, “although the needs that she has experienced could have caused her to deviate from the path of virtue, raising her hopes to God our Lord, she has subsisted and continues to the present in the frequentation of the sacraments (. . .) [and] she has comported herself with the honor corresponding to the nobility of her parents.” What doña María insinuated is that she was able to overcome the temptation of prostitution thanks to the nobility of her family and her religious practices. More explicit was an orphan maiden, María Faustina Rodríguez, who declared that she had to beg because it was impossible for her to make a living from the needle and, on the other hand she did not want to lose her virginity. In part, through providing this financial aid, the authorities showed that they were interested in restricting prostitution among middle-class, white women.⁵⁶

Numerous female applicants had been wealthy, but they were not nobles. That is to say, they had material goods (including real estate) or they had enjoyed an appreciable mercantile capital, but now they did not have money to pay for daily needs, which is known now as monetary poverty. Some cases illustrate these conditions. “Of proportions,” that is, a well-to-do family, was that of don Mateo de la Torre, but now his widow, doña Francisca García y Cavero, had no means to make a living. Doña Luisa Montalvo, the widow of a high militia officer, had three single daughters (one of them mad and blind). Doña Manuela Barahona was the daughter of a captain of the navy and widow of a high officer of the colonial army who had to sustain herself, her widowed daughter, and her orphaned grandson, begging in the streets. Doña Clara and doña Micaela Carrión y Tagle were daughters of the late don Alfonso Carrión, lawyer of the Real Audiencia. Their two brothers were clerics but they did not

55. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 21, 253, 283, 846, 899, 901, 902.

56. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 14, 18, 208, 242, 312. The fear of falling into prostitution is also evident in other applications. For example, doña María Anselma Solar, a widow with a daughter, said she had no means to make a decent living, “for which reason it is likely to fall in the cliffs from where often fall girls with no aid,” or as doña María del Carmen Rodríguez said she did not want “to break the limits of her virginity.” Doña Manuela Núñez did not say she was a virgin but she did want “not to engage in other improper things that disturbs the stillness in which I live.” More direct was the widow doña Juana Bórquez who while asking for help for herself and for her two daughters, hoped they would not be “exposed by their extreme indigence to pitfalls that the combination of youth with need brings.” Another maiden affirmed that she grew up with two ladies who protected her virginity and whose social quality prevents her from contracting a vile reputation. Several women pointed out that by being seamstresses they managed to avoid falling into prostitution or the suspicion of being or having been a prostitute in their youth. For cases, see AAL, Pobres, Apps. 39, 55, 138, 144, 160, 321, 322, 323, 327, 330, 331, 332.

receive any aid from them. Three legitimate daughters of the late don Joaquín José de Arrese, member of the military order of Santiago, had no share of the meager rent left by their father to his two sons. As a result, doña Josefa, doña Manuela Paula, and doña Micaela Damiana de Arrese had to work with their hands to make a living. Doña María Dionisia Ramos y Panadero had no means of subsistence when her father, don Francisco Ramos, lawyer of the Real Audiencia of Lima died. Her sister, doña Tomasa Ramos y Panadero, suffered a similar fate when her husband, don Simón Dans Rojas, abandoned the city “with no hope to see him again,” with three single daughters and two sons. Doña Luisa Dubois had five sons and was the widow of don Camilo Montes, administrator of the customs of the northern port of Guayaquil, while doña Teodora Guerrero was the widow of the impoverished merchant don Fernando Salvatierra, and doña María Josefa González Buendía became extremely poor when the resources of her late husband, the merchant don Santiago Fano, were confiscated for unpaid debts. A similar case is that of doña María Teresa de Arozarena, wife of don José Antonio Ocharán. This couple, in accordance with doña María Teresa’s request, had five sons and three maidens whom they had nothing to feed because her husband was absent “with notorious delays stemming not from ill will but from contrasts of luck,” (. . .) “and cannot contribute to their more precise subsistence.” In some cases, the cause of poverty, especially for women, stemmed from the fact that they had spent their fortune to live off their income. In other cases, poverty is associated with the loss of property in lawsuits and bad deals. In some other cases, coming from another region was listed as the cause of the extreme poverty, especially for women. Women had come to the city thinking that the situation would improve there, but they found themselves in even greater poverty. Doña María Josefa Salgado, for example, pointed out that because she and her two daughters were foreigners, despite being virtuous, their fate was dark in the city.⁵⁷

That not all the supplicants were elite women is clear from the case of doña Matea Cañoli y Sumarán, widow of captain don José Callejón. The surnames speak to their Black or mulatto origins and, most probably, the late husband was captain of the battalion of militia of *pardos* (colored). Another example is that of doña Josefa Pereyra, who asked for ecclesiastic help because she had to toil along with her husband and five sons on an orchard in the outskirts of the city. Perhaps these and other cases also show the tendency of ordinary people to claim the benefits of the elite. The documentation do not state the decision of the archbishop, but barely the Church changed its mind about the social status of the needy.⁵⁸

57. AAL, Pobres, Apps. 3, 25, 102, 128, 132, 164, 165, 188, 196, 231, 293, 317, 358.

58. AAL, Pobres. Examples taken from applications 58 and 121. Doña Josefa Pereyra and her husband, don Manuel González, lived with their five children in the orchard El Pozo that they rented near the gate of Santa Catalina. Her husband, she says “does not omit barefoot and take a hoe as the most wretch slave.” So did she herself and her

The request of archiepiscopal aid, then, was the alternative used by impoverished elite women of Lima to cope with the economic and social crisis of the late colonial period. Those were women who in the past had been involved in the economy through their labor with the *aguja* (needle). Being a personal strategy, it reflects a societal problem of great proportion, since the 1,066 applications involved more than 2,000 women, approximately one-fifth to one-fourth of the female white population of the city, which was estimated around 9,000 in 1790 and 11,000 in 1813. That is to say, a good share of the Limeño social elite joined lower sectors of the population to complete a grim picture of the labor-force in late colonial Lima.

...

As a result of the Bourbon changes and certain social transformations during the last decades of the colonial period, the middle and emerging sectors questioned the archaic social order in force in the viceroyalty and, in particular, in the city of Lima. Although limited, social mobility in its imitation and identification of behavioral patterns a way of social assimilation, claiming to belong to the generic category of “Spaniards.” The response of the elites to this “chaos” was to reaffirm themselves in that order while refusing to adapt to the new social conditions. The description of the popular and middle sectors as vicious and lacking honor allowed them to present themselves as the correct sector of society and, consequently, maintain statutory and caste distinctions in social relations. Although, the elites appropriated the moralistic and hygienist discourse of the Enlightenment regarding the role of women in modern society, pretending to be considered part of the global modernizing trend. Both discourses, which support conflicting and almost contradictory identities, can be seen in the reports and essays of the spokespersons of the social elites, published in the Lima press of the 1790s (*Mercurio peruano*, *Diario de Lima* and *Seminario crítico*).

Labor is a propitious ground to evaluate these attitudes and procedures. The deterioration of the economic situation of a good share of the formerly wealthy sectors forced the elites to review their convictions about their role in the world of work in the city. In fact, many Spanish women faced the problem and

children (AAL, Pobres, App. 121). Given the strict requirements of modesty and virtue for applicants, the story of doña Gregoria Rodríguez might not correspond to the desired pattern of those women claiming ecclesiastic allowances. She was born in Trujillo (northern Peru) but had to beg when she became an orphan until “she was tied to a man who was not her lawful husband, from whom [she] unfortunately only obtained disappointments.” Later on, she was abandoned with three children (two daughters and a son) (AAL, Pobres, App. 139). So did the eighteen cases of single mothers that applied for ecclesiastical help in 1806. In all these cases, the behavior of women and men differed from the model of conduct that was required to be considered “solemnly poor.”

sought to solve it by working in the productive activities of the city and, especially, in the tobacco factory and the large manufacturing project based on the textile production of those years. However, most of the elite women preferred to stay within the framework of traditional labor forms: home work.

As we have seen in the analysis of the impressive documentation available, trades and economic activities made the difference among Limeño women's social status. Although sewing was shared by elite and plebeian women, its exercise was conducted differently in each case. In contrast to plebeian women, a noble woman was unable to exercise a trade outside the household as it was considered to be vile. The option to receive financial aid from the Church was real but insufficient. Receiving only two to three pesos a month, a family of a high social level faced real economic necessity and exposure to public shame asking for such amounts of money.

The cases under study are telling. The information analyzed shows how vulnerable an important part of the social elites could be in a city traditionally considered powerful. The wealthy sectors related to commerce and the bureaucracy depended on political ties to maintain their social and economic status. The reforms altered their living conditions to such an extent that adverse personal or family circumstances such as widowhood or orphanhood, illness, disability, or abandonment left families in conditions of monetary poverty with few alternatives at their disposal.

The opulent city of Lima, the *Ciudad de los Reyes* or The City of the Kings, was actually in part the City of the Poor by the end of the colonial period.

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