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Where have all the businesswomen gone?

Northwestern Europe vs. the Iberian Peninsula, XV-XIX centuries

Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program
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Introduction

Public knowledge concerning women's historical business activities remains limited. With the exception of gender, business, and women's historians, most people assume that women did not participate in business before the 20th century.

Why this assumption?

1. Presently, men occupy most senior management positions. Therefore, many people assume that this was always the case.
2. Individuals overlook small family businesses and petty traders.
3. Women's business activities are hidden in seemingly counterintuitive archival sources.

Were women really absent from business before the 20th century?

Historians have focused on France, England, Germany, and the Low Countries. Research on the Mediterranean and the Iberian Peninsula has yet to be well integrated into the larger European framework.

The question:

How did Spanish and Portuguese women's business activities compare to those of their northwestern European counterparts between the 15th and 19th centuries?

Methodology

Spanish and Portuguese women's historical business activities are induced from quantitative and qualitative data compiled in monographs and journal articles.

Particular attention is paid to small family business (F), petty trade (P), and long distance trade (T).

Iberian women's historical business activities are then compared to the broad premises synthesized by historians regarding northwestern European women's business activities.

The Northwestern European context

Early Modern Europe: 15th to 18th centuries

1. Petty trade (market stalls and peddling) was dominated by poor women; these women fiercely defended their business activities against men.
2. Women in small businesses clustered in trades that reflected their household duties (eg. textile production), but a minority were found in atypical "masculine" activities (eg. blacksmiths).
3. With the exception of needlework crafts, guilds restricted women's ability to gain formal craft training and rarely accepted them as members in their own right.
4. Married women usually managed artisanal workshops or transatlantic trading houses in the absence or death of their husbands.

The Age of Industrialization: 19th century

1. "Separate Sphere Ideology": Men worked in the public sphere, while middle and upper class women remained at home. Only poor women worked outside the home.
2. Large businesses were less frequently family businesses. Yet, a "consumer revolution" expanded the retail of commodities mostly bought and sold by women.
3. Guilds were abolished, but for the most part, women continued to be excluded from traditionally "masculine" crafts.

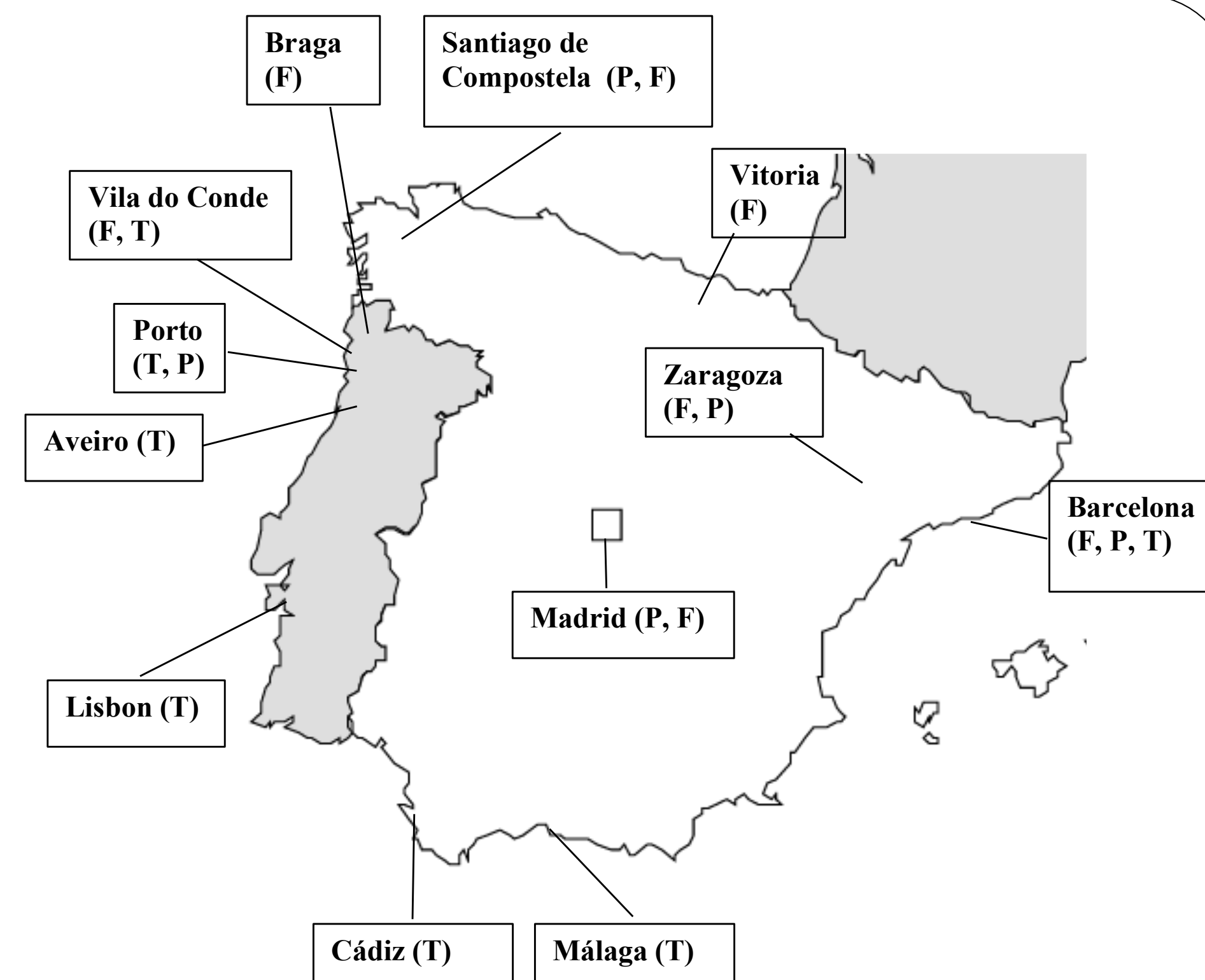


Figure 1. Map of the Iberian Peninsula outlining the studied cities and their associated female business activities, as described in the secondary literature.

Results: The Iberian Peninsula

Figure 2. Causes and consequences of male absence on early modern maritime communities in the Iberian Peninsula.

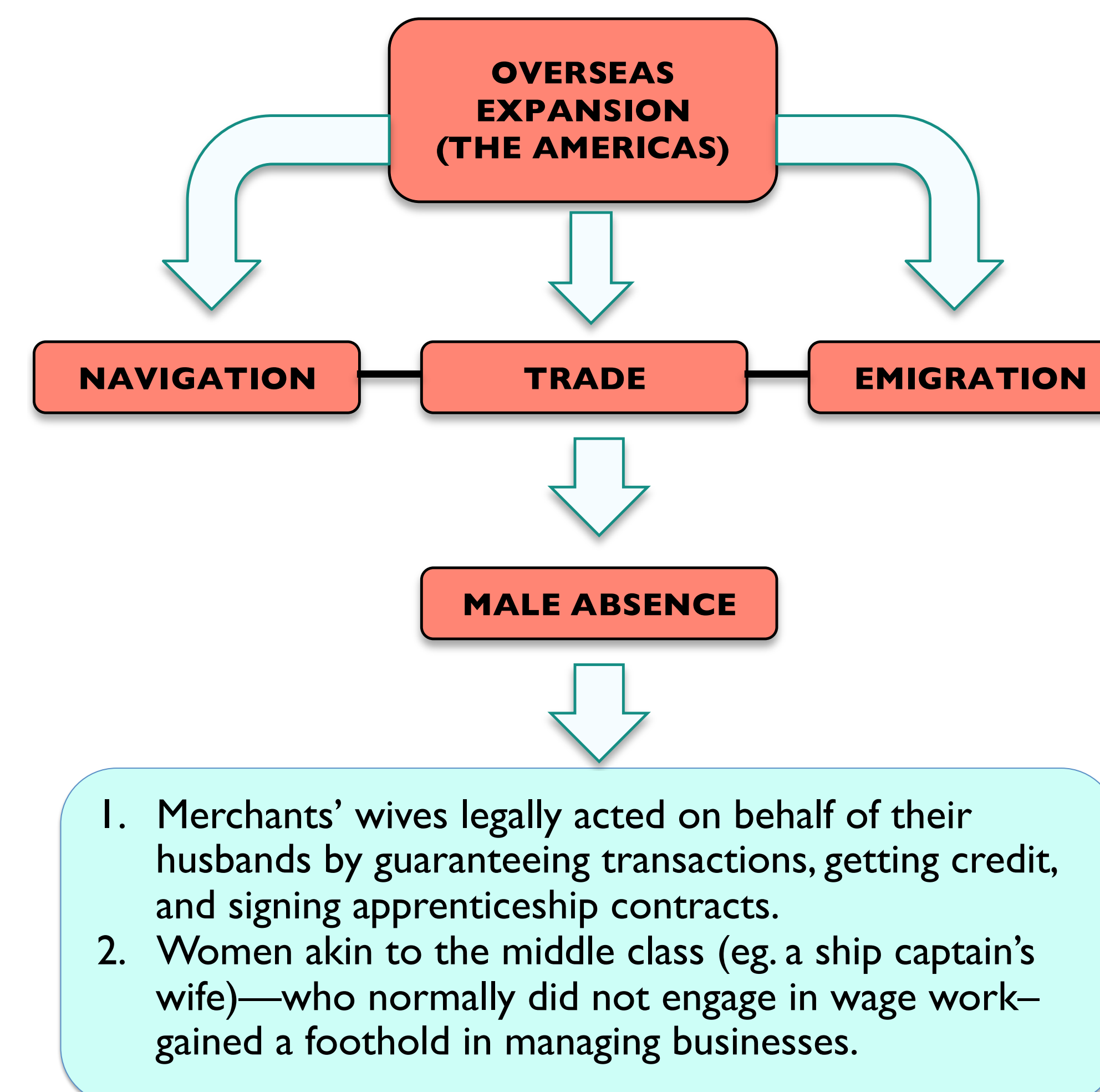


Figure 3. Impacts of guilds on Iberian craftswomen from the 15th to 19th centuries.

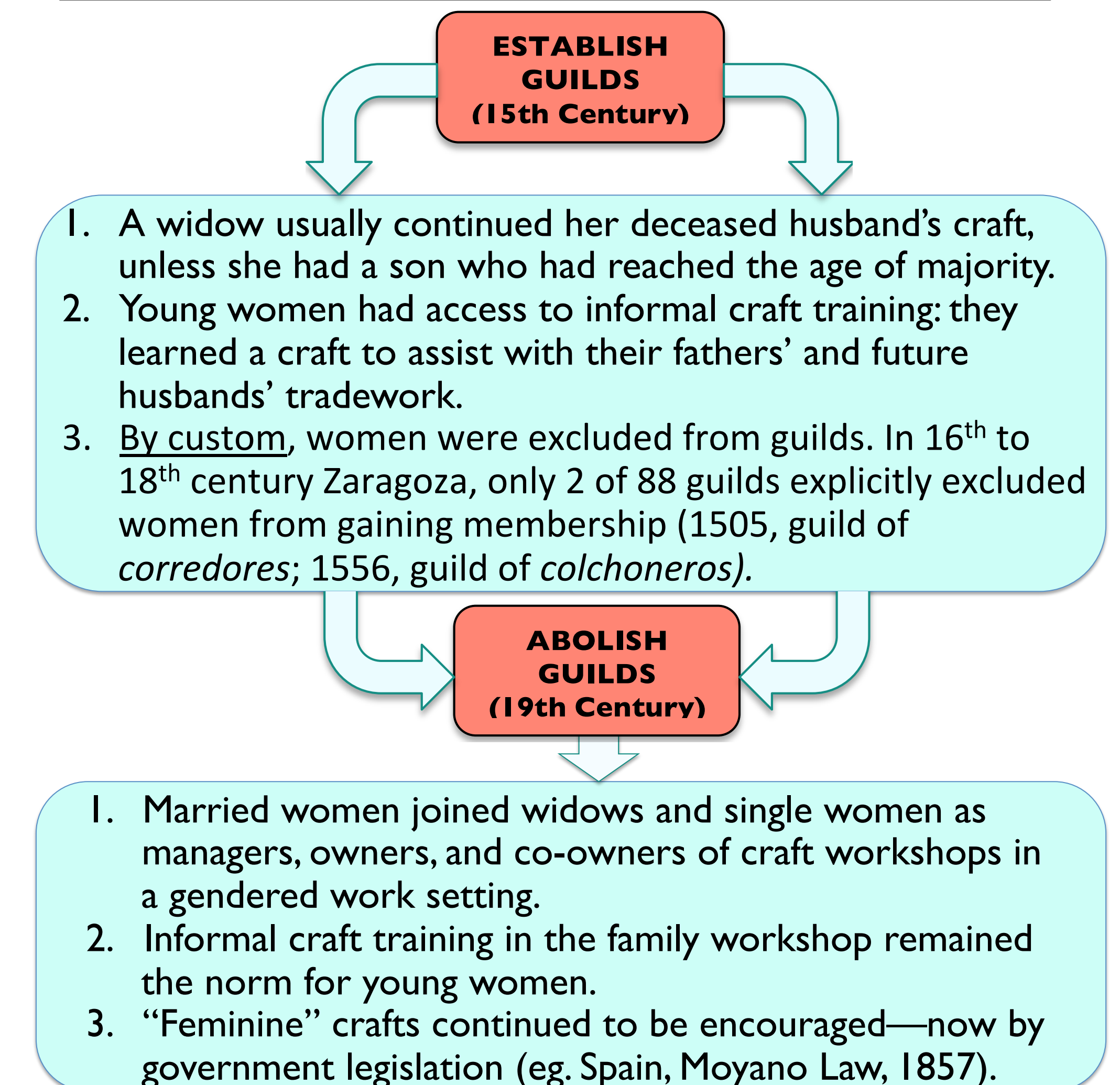


Table 1. An overview of Iberian women's business activities, as described in the secondary literature.

	Petty Trade	Small Family Business	Long Distance Trade
15 th -18 th Centuries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barcelona (1778): The calico peddler. 2. Zaragoza: The bread peddler. 3. Santiago de Compostela, Porto, and Madrid: The haggler (<i>regatona</i> or <i>regatera</i>) illegally resells food in public markets and streets. 4. Madrid (1714): Fish at Plaza Mayor; oranges, used clothing, melons, chocolate, and meat. 	<p>Typical Tradeswork</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Catalonian coast (white-lace makers: <i>blondistes</i>), Vila do Conde (potters, weavers, bakers), Braga (weavers), Vitoria (seamstresses), Zaragoza (basket-makers), and Porto (bakers). <p>Atypical Tradeswork</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Zaragoza (plasterer, glazier; bricklayer, miller, carpenter), Vitoria (leather tanner), Aveiro (wooden shoemaker), and Santiago de Compostela (glazier). <p>Other Typical Shopkeepers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vila do Conde (inns) and Vitoria (taverns). 	<p>Spain</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barcelona, Cádiz, and Málaga: Mid to late 18th century calico trade (Maria Gibert, Bernarda Porro de Gibraltar, and Petronila Vene). <p>Portugal</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Porto: Newfoundland cod and ships (Margarida Francisca), sugar (Isabel Vaz), slaves and wool (Ana Antonia). 2. Aveiro: Salt (Maria Carneira Aranha). 3. Lisbon: Spices (Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi: 1501-1569, The House of Mendes).
19 th Century	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barcelona: Market stalls for sellers of dried fruits and horticulturalists. 	<p>Typical and Atypical Shopkeepers</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Barcelona (1823-1860): Women own more than half of the businesses in twine, combs, food, dressmaking, but own less than half of the wood and metal workshops. Poor women often own espadrille workshops. 	<p>Portugal</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Douro Region: Viticulture (Doña Antónia Adelaide Ferreira, 1811-1896).

Conclusion

Early modern period: Iberian women dominated petty trade, usually clustered in trades that reflected their household duties, were excluded from guilds involving non-needlework crafts unless they were widows, substituted for their absent husbands, and atypically engaged in construction activities in Zaragoza.

Nineteenth century: Iberian women's business activities did not model the Separate Sphere ideology. One large Port wine business is known to have profited from the consumer revolution. Craftswomen continued to predominately work in "feminine" crafts, but were not necessarily excluded from "masculine" crafts after the abolition of guilds.

Future research

1. Quantitative research for Galicia, Extremadura, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha, Asturias, and southern Portugal.
2. The existence of female bankers.
3. The business activities of female Iberian emigrants in Angola, Mozambique, North Africa, and South America.

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