

The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 20, No 1 (2023)

The Historical Review / La Revue Historique

The *H*istorical Review
La Revue *H*istorique



VOLUME XX (2023)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

Women Artisans in Collective Defence of their Independent Work in Seventeenth-Century Barcelona

Mercè Renom, Àngels Solà

doi: [10.12681/hr.40068](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.40068)

Copyright © 2025



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Renom, M., & Solà, Àngels. (2025). Women Artisans in Collective Defence of their Independent Work in Seventeenth-Century Barcelona. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 20(1), 293–316. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.40068>

WOMEN ARTISANS IN COLLECTIVE DEFENCE OF THEIR INDEPENDENT WORK IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BARCELONA

Mercè Renom and Àngels Solà

ABSTRACT: This article analyses the collective actions undertaken by some Barcelona women textile artisans in the seventeenth century in defence of their independent work. The article opens with a comparative overview of the mobilisations of European women artisans. After it received petitions from some Barcelona filempueres (female veil weavers) between 1633 and 1635 complaining about their goods being confiscated by the silk weavers' guild, in 1636 the Barcelona city government enacted a specific ordinance for women who produced small textile garments (*Ordinació en favor de les dones*). This ordinance, and its expansion in 1663 and 1686, reinforced the right of women to work in the production of seven textile and clothing items. Despite this, the women artisans continued to be harassed, but they successfully defended their work collectively on a number of subsequent occasions.

Since the 1980s, the history of preindustrial women has repeatedly addressed women's work, especially in relation to the guilds. A great deal has been written about the importance of the work of the wives of guild masters in the family workshop, about the characteristics of the work of women artisans and about the opposition of the guilds to independent work by women.¹

However, there are aspects of this general topic that have hardly been addressed despite their importance. This article will focus on two of them. The first is: did

* The authors are researchers with the TIG group of the University of Barcelona, which is recognised by the Generalitat of Catalonia (SGR2017-1258 and SGR2022). This research is part of the project "Labour Worlds in Transition (1750–1930): Qualification, Mobility and Inequalities" (HAR2017-84030-P, Call 2017: State Research Agency/European Regional Development Fund, and PID2021-122261NB-I00). We presented a previous version of this paper as "The Autonomous Silk Artisan Women of Barcelona: Filempueres and Tafetaneres in the 17th and 18th Centuries" to the 10th European Social Science History Conference, Vienna, April 2014. 2014. Mercè Renom's ORCID: 0000-0002-9692-953X; Àngels Solà's ORCID: 0000-0002-8628-6171.

¹ For example, Natalie Z. Davis, "Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-century Lyon," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 1 (1982): 46–80; Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Daryl M. Hafter, ed., *European Women and Preindustrial Craft* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University

women artisans defend themselves against the attempts by guilds to forbid or control their independent work? This question, already raised by Merry Wiesner in 1986, has hardly received any analysis.² The second is: what was the position of the authorities in the face of the aggression of guilds against independent female work?

There is no debate on the first issue because monographs are lacking, although some occasional and scattered information can be found on certain episodes which show that women artisans did defend themselves. It should be said that Sheilagh Ogilvie mentioned the existence of guild aggression against female artisans, but did not consider whether they responded since this subject was beyond the scope of her study on guilds.³ As regards the second question, Ogilvie considers that “government did not prevent guilds from oppressing women”.⁴ Her opinion contrasts with that of Maria Paola Zanaboni, who maintains that municipal governments often protected women’s work, providing as an example the eight times that this occurred in Venice between 1344 and 1534.⁵ These historians basically refer to different periods, making it necessary to conduct further research in order to ask whether the position of the municipal authorities in the face of these issues changed over time as merchant capitalism advanced.

This article mainly studies the actions that Barcelona artisan women undertook in the seventeenth century to defend their work, mainly collectively, not only in the face of harassment by the guilds, but also looking at the issue within the European framework, starting from the existing bibliography. While the women normally brought these cases before the city council courts, where they denounced the harassment of some guilds that requisitioned the

Press, 2007). For the state of the art on women’s work and guilds, see Clare Crowston, “Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research,” in “The Return of the Guilds,” ed. Jan Lucassen, Tine De Moor, and Jan Luiten van Zanden, supplement 16, *International Review of Social History* 53 (2008): 19–44; Ariadne Schmidt, “Women and Guilds: Corporations and Female Labour Market Participation in Early Modern Holland,” *Gender and History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 170–89; Victoria López Barahona, “Mujeres y marco gremial en Madrid durante la Edad Moderna: La política sexual del privilegio,” in *Artesanos, gremios y género en el sur de Europa (siglos XVI–XIX)*, ed. Àngels Solà (Barcelona: Icaria editorial; Publicacions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2019), 127–49. For the most recent summary on women’s work and guilds, see Sheilagh Ogilvie, *The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

² Wiesner, *Working Women*, 8.

³ Ogilvie, *European Guilds*, 282–84.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 566.

⁵ Maria Paola Zanaboni, *Donne al lavoro nell’Italia e nell’Europa medievali (secoli XIII–XV)* (Sesto San Giovanni: Jouvence, 2016), 69–71.

pieces they manufactured, on one occasion they started a lawsuit in a higher court and, on another, they sought a ban on the use of engine looms to make ribbons. The article demonstrates the capacity of these women artisans to act and to improve their social and economic condition and that of all their fellow citizens.

This research therefore falls within the theory of female agency, defined by Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach as the capacity for action, even if limited by the institutional and structural constraints dictated by the power relations of a patriarchal society.⁶ It is important to note, as Martha Howell has stressed, that the defence of the working space of artisan women, although it could not change the prevailing hierarchical order, could modify gender relations and expand the space of female action at that historical moment.⁷

This research is based above all on judicial documentation, an extremely useful source that, as indicated by Marcia Schmidt Blaine, allows us to hear the voices and arguments of the main characters involved.⁸ The complaints and demands of ordinary people before the courts in the modern and mediaeval eras in Europe and America have been studied for some decades.⁹ However, few studies deal with the voices of women – which are always filtered by lawyers or authorities – and even less with the questions raised about labour issues, whether in European or in Spanish and Catalan historiography.¹⁰ We have also consulted the work of the chronicler, municipal official and diplomat of Barcelona Esteve G. Bruniquer (1561–1641), who wrote a long record of the

⁶ Deborah Simonton and Anne Montenach, eds., *Female Agency in the Urban Economy: Gender in European Towns, 1640–1830* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3–6.

⁷ Martha Howell, “The Problem of Women’s Agency in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” in *Women and Gender in the Early Modern Low Countries, 1500–1700*, ed. Sarah Joan Moran and Amanda Pipkin (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 21–31.

⁸ Marcia Schmidt Blaine, “The Power of Petitions: Women and the New Hampshire Provincial Government, 1695–1770,” in “Petitions in Social History,” ed. Lex Heerma van Voss, supplement 9, *International Review of Social History* 46 (2001): 55.

⁹ See, for example, Van Voss, “Petitions in Social History”; Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, eds., *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Bronach Kane and Fiona Williamson, eds., *Women, Agency and the Law, 1300–1700* (London: Routledge, 2013); Margarita Ortega López, “Estrategias de defensa de las mujeres de la sociedad popular española del siglo XVIII,” *Arenal: Revista de Historia de las Mujeres* 5, no. 2 (1998): 277–305. Cerutti characterises certain labour circumstances of women artisans through an analysis of petitions. Simona Cerutti, “Travail, mobilité et légitimité: Suppliques au roi dans une société d’Ancien Régime (Turin, XVIII siècle),” *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 65, no. 3 (2010): 571–611.

city's most significant events, later continued by other authors.¹¹ This work has allowed us to discover the petitions that the women artisans submitted to the municipal council regarding the harm caused to their work by the guilds, and the authorities' decision on the problem. We have followed the most complex conflicts in the municipal documentation of the Registre de Deliberacions (Record of Deliberations), which contains the petitions of the litigants and the decision of the authorities.¹² The lawsuit initiated by a group of women artisans (the *filempueres*, who wove a certain type of silk or linen veil) in 1661 against the silk weavers' (*velers*) guild led the latter to compile a great deal of information that has been conserved in the archives of this guild. This documentation is essential in charting and understanding the development of the long conflict which existed between these women artisans and the aforementioned guild.¹³ The guild's regulations that we consulted can be found in the Ordinacions gremials collection of the same municipal archive.¹⁴

This article adds to the research that Marta Vicente and Montserrat Carbonell undertook from the end of the 1980s on women's work in Barcelona in the modern age. Both showed how, despite the restrictions of the guilds, women artisans worked independently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁵

¹¹ It consists of 12,000 records of various events which occurred in the city from 1249 to 1714. The manuscript, over 1,200 pages long, was transcribed and published in five volumes in 1912–1916. It can be consulted online on Barcelona City Council's website. *Rúbriques de Bruniquer: Ceremonial dels Magnífics Consellers y Regiment de la ciutat de Barcelona, publicades per F. Carreras i Candi i B. Gonyalons i Bou* (Barcelona: D'Henrich, 1912–1916), mainly vol. 5 (hereafter, *Bruniquer*).

¹² Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Registre de Deliberacions (AHCB, Deliberacions), 02.01-1BII.

¹³ Arxiu del Col·legi d'Art Major de la Seda de Barcelona deposited in the AHCB. This collection includes some decisions of the High Court of Catalonia, the Catalan Court (Reial Audiència de Catalunya). AHCB3-327/5D.97 Col·legi d'Art Major de la Seda de Barcelona (hereafter, AHCB3-CAMSB). The authors who, to date, have addressed these conflicts between the silk weavers' guilds and the women silk artisans of Barcelona were unaware of this documentation, therefore undertaking an incomplete analysis of the same.

¹⁴ AHCB, Registre d'Ordinacions (AHCB, Ordinacions), 03-1B.IV.

¹⁵ Montserrat Carbonell Esteller, "El treball de les dones a Catalunya moderna," in *Més enllà del silenci: Les dones a la història de Catalunya*, ed. Mary Nash (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1988), 115–28; Marta Vicente Valentín, "Mujeres artesanas en la Barcelona moderna," in *Las mujeres en el Antiguo Régimen: Imagen y realidad (s. XVI–XVIII)*, ed. Isabel Pérez Molina (Barcelona: Icaria, 1994), 59–90; Vicente Valentín, "El treball de la dona dins els gremis a la Barcelona del segle XVIII (una aproximació)," *Pedralbes: Revista d'Història* 8, no. 2 (1988): 267–76; Marta Vicente Valentín, "El treball de les dones en els gremis de la Barcelona moderna," *L'Avenç* 143 (1990): 36–39.

Vicente, using judicial and guild documentation, also highlighted the important role of women in the families of master artisans. With this information she stressed the importance that the figure of the “woman of valour” – constructed by Spanish moralists since the end of the sixteenth century – had in the female fight to keep their businesses operational.¹⁶ However, few specific studies have subsequently been conducted on women’s work and their relations with the guilds.¹⁷ Josep Capdeferro addressed in a monograph the conflicts between guilds and women on the basis of judicial documentation.¹⁸

This article consists of two sections, in addition to this introduction and the conclusion. The first section describes various episodes in which European women artisans defended their productive work against harassment. The second section explains the specific case of the defensive actions of women artisans of Barcelona throughout the seventeenth century.

Women in Defence of their Work: A European Framework

As has been said, numerous studies have indicated that in the early modern age guilds wanted to control women, even repressed their independent work and often restricted that of the wives and daughters of guild masters. On the

¹⁶ Marta Vicente Valentín, “Textual Uncertainties: The Written Legacy of Women Entrepreneurs in Eighteenth-century Spain,” in *Women, Texts and Authority in the Early Modern Spanish World*, ed. Marta Vicente Valentín and Luis R. Corteguera (London: Routledge, 2004), 183–95; Marta Vicente Valentín, “Comerciar en femení: La identitat de les empresàries a la Barcelona del segle XVIII,” *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura* 56 (2008): 47–59; Marta Vicente Valentín, “Les dones i el treball,” in *Les dones: Barcelona 1700*, ed. Albert García Espuche (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2015), 143–75.

¹⁷ Àngels Solà Parera, “Impressores i llibreteres a la Barcelona dels segles XVIII i XIX,” *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura* 56 (2007): 91–129; Yoshiko Yamamichi and Àngels Solà Parera, “Hijas, esposas y viudas: Las aportaciones de las mujeres de los sederos al negocio familiar. Barcelona, 1770–1817,” in *Palacios, plazas, patíbulos: La sociedad española moderna entre el cambio y las resistencias*, ed. James Amelang et al. (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2018), 167–80. On the lace businesswomen who were not controlled by any guild, see Àngels Solà Parera, “Les puntaires del Baix Llobregat: Primeres notes per a un estudi socioeconòmic,” in *Les dones i la història al Baix Llobregat*, ed. Cristina Borderías and Soledad Bengoechea, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 2002), 1:315–36.

¹⁸ Josep Capdeferro Pla, “Mujeres y trabajo en Barcelona a través de procesos judiciales inéditos (1560–1710),” in Solà, *Artesanos, gremios*, 77–100. Costa has studied the requests for separation from women before the ecclesiastical court in the eighteenth century; although she states that the cause of the separation was sometimes for financial reasons, she does not explain them. Marie Costa, *Dones rebels, dones alliberades: El divorci a Catalunya en els segles XVIII i XIX* (Vic: Eumo, 2016).

contrary, there are few studies on the response of women to this aggression, although references can be found to these actions in books and articles which analyse other issues such as, for example, the behaviour of guilds in the face of female labour or the female identity of artisans.

From the scattered bibliographic information and our own research on women artisans in Barcelona, we have compiled 25 episodes – 14 of which are from Barcelona – in which women defended their right to work in one or another way in different cities of Western Europe between 1430 and 1692 (see the Appendix). Most of them involve lawsuits taken before the municipal or higher authorities. However, there was one episode with some violence: that of the wool spinners of Barcelona who, in 1628, loudly protested in front of the city hall¹⁹ because wool was being taken from the city to be spun in other towns, leaving them without work.²⁰ On the other hand, the *filempueres* of Barcelona, in September 1661, after having submitted several complaints against the confiscations of their work,²¹ filed a second instance lawsuit before the Catalan Court against the officers of the silk weavers' guild.

The cases shown in the Appendix basically involve collective actions of women, a central characteristic of our study, although one individual action has also been included in view of its significance. If we were to add the complaints and lawsuits on labour issues submitted before the courts individually by women, the list would be much longer.²²

The group complaints submitted rarely indicated the number of female complainants. Only ten cases mentioned how many were involved, the number ranging from two to nineteen women. In the 1686 case of the Barcelona *tafetaneres* (women who wove narrow and coarse ribbons made of silk, linen or cotton), the claimants were five widows who said that they represented other married or single women. The case of the handmade ribbon women artisans from the same city (1692) involved eleven women, seven of them widows. The action with the largest participation was that of the more than forty female wool spinners of Barcelona mentioned above who, in 1628, demonstrated in front of the city hall.

¹⁹ On the forms of protest, see Mercè Renom, "Les formes i el lèxic de la protesta a la fi de l'antic Règim," *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura* 55 (2007): 5–33.

²⁰ Jaime Carrera Pujal, *Historia política y económica de Cataluña: Siglos XVI al XVIII*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Bosch, 1947), 2:175. AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-137, fol. 49–50, and the letter included among fol. 50–51.

²¹ January 1650, July 1659, November 1660 and May 1661. AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663); and Ex. 91 (1663–1664).

²² For example, between 1560 and 1769 the women artisans of Barcelona individually confronted about 40 court cases, according to the studies of Vicente and Capdeferro. Vicente, "Mujeres artesanas"; Capdeferro, "Mujeres y trabajo".

The majority of the cases were in response to the harassment of the craft guilds and very few referred to labour problems arising in the commercial sphere, such as that of the sardine sellers of Bilbao (1510) and the *lingères* of Rouen (1586), who protested against the municipal authorities' decision to dictate the location of their points of sale.²³

The petitions were submitted almost exclusively against textile or clothing guilds, the exception being those presented by women from the commercial sector indicated in the previous paragraph and the female butchers (1634), the *abaixadores*²⁴ (1658) and the women who made strings for musical instruments (*corderas de viola*) (1645 and 1660) of Barcelona.²⁵ The ribbon makers of Zaragoza who protested in 1628 were a particular case, since they denounced their working conditions, indicating that they were women artisans subcontracted by rich artisans or merchants, and not independent women artisans like the others included in the Appendix.²⁶ This predominance of actions in the textile sector should not come as a surprise because, as is well known, this was the sector which normally employed the most women in urban productive activities in the modern age. The silk weavers – of Strasbourg, Basel, Palermo, Zaragoza and Barcelona,²⁷ and maybe also the women artisans from the ribbon maker-fringe maker-lacemaker guild of Rouen²⁸ – who made different types of veils and ribbons were the women who presented the highest number of petitions (a total of twelve), to a large extent because the *filempueres* of Barcelona did so six times. The *lingères en vieux* of Rouen were also combative: in 1439 they defended

²³ M. Isabel del Val Valdivieso, "La historia de las mujeres medievales en España," in *Ser mujer en la ciudad medieval europea*, ed. Jesús Ángel Solorzano, Beatriz Arízaga Bolumburu and Amelia Aguiar Andrade (Logroño: Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2013), 30; Susan Broomhall, "The Fragility of Women's Rights: How Female Guilds Wielded Power Long Ago," *The Conversation*, 7 March 2017, <https://theconversation.com/the-fragility-of-womens-rights-how-female-guilds-wielded-power-long-ago-73264>.

²⁴ Artisan women who cleaned, softened and finished the treatment of animal hides.

²⁵ See Appendix.

²⁶ Margarita Ortega López, "El periodo Barroco (1565–1700)," in *Historia de las mujeres en España*, ed. Elisa Garrido (Madrid: Síntesis, 1997), 339.

²⁷ Katharina C. Simon-Muscheid, "La lutte des maîtres tisserands contre les tisserandes à Bale: La condition féminine au XVe siècle," in *La donna nell'economia secc. XII–XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Mondadori, 1990), 387; Gabriella Lombardo, "Guilds in Early Modern Sicily: Causes and Consequences of their Weakness" (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 2001), 11; Ortega, "Periodo Barroco," 339. AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01–1BII–137, fol. 49–50; Deliberacions, 02.01–1BII–195, fol. 183v–184; Deliberacions 02.01–1BII–201; AHCB3–CAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663) and 91 (1663–1664).

²⁸ It is possible that these women artisans used linen and not silk.

themselves against the *lingères en neuf*, who had confiscated a series of pieces from them.²⁹ The dressmakers of Paris, who had their own guild, had to defend themselves against various opponents at the end of the seventeenth century: the tailors' guild, the wives and daughters of the tailors and the dressmakers who did not want to join the guild, and also the dressmakers of the guild who did not want to pay the membership fee.³⁰

Some petitions and protests were directed against the municipal authorities. We have already mentioned the cases of the female sellers from Bilbao and Rouen (1510 and 1586, respectively) and those of the wool spinners of Barcelona (1628). Another petition was submitted against technological innovation: in 1692 the Barcelona women artisans who made ribbons asked the city council to forbid the use of the engine loom. In most cases, the municipal authorities acted as judicial agents.

These known actions by women basically occurred in France, Italy and Spain – Catalonia, in particular – due to the bias imposed by the bibliography used (in English and in several Romance languages), but also in Basel and Strasbourg. However, given the low level of studies on this problem, comparisons cannot be made between countries according to the dominant religion, family structure or other determinants.

Details on the civil status of most of the women who submitted petitions and legal challenges are not available. We only know that seven of the twenty-five petitions and lawsuits included were presented by widows and that in the case of the *tafetaneres* of Barcelona (1686) there were widows, married women and single women, although the reply from the guild did not mention the single women.³¹ However, this data allows us to say that the status of a widow opened doors but that being a single woman probably closed them.

The result of the women's action is known in 14 cases, all of which ended in favour of the women. The female veil weavers of Strasbourg (1430), Basel (1450)

²⁹ Hafter, *Women at Work*, 16.

³⁰ Clare Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 226–30.

³¹ In the petition there are widows, married and single women. AHCB Deliberacions, 02.01–1BII–195, fol. 183v–184 and document included between pages. The officer's document only mentions widows or married women. *Allegacio en fet dels medis entre altres que iustificquen la instancia de la causa que las Confrarias dels mestres perxers, velers y velluters prosegueixen contra algunas donas que sens titol fan fer tafetanets de tots colors y midas y venen aquells en botiga, en gros y a la menuda publicament a relació del magnífich doctor Miquel de Taverner y Rubí, meritíssim Senador de la R. A., notari Pera Pau Riber*, n.p., n.d. We can almost certainly relate this document to the 1686 conflict, since both sources mentioned indicate the lawyers involved. The document is conserved in different archives, for example in the Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fullets Bonsoms, 2759.

and Palermo (1628) succeeded in not having to pay a fee to the related male guild. They thus managed to avoid the guild's control. The greatest successes were achieved by the *chaperonnières* of Rouen (who sewed hairnets) (1497–1504) and the *filempueres* of Barcelona (1636). The former succeeded in establishing their own guild after being removed from the tailors' guild at their own request.³² In 1636, the women artisans of Barcelona had their business protected – as will be seen in detail in the next section – by the Ordinance in Favour of Women (Ordinació en favor de les dones) enacted by the city council, which applied to another six female textile and clothing trades. The Barcelona municipal authorities also approved the petitions of the female butchers (1634), the *abaixadores* (1650) and the string makers (*corderes de viola*) (1645 and 1660), all widows of guild masters, who asked to be able to continue with the marital shop. Their status as widows of guild masters was certainly a decisive factor in the decision in favour of their petition but this does not mean that it was always easy to achieve. The sardine sellers of Bilbao also succeeded in being allowed to sell fish where they wanted.

The resolutions of women artisans' petitions sometimes seem to have been the result of negotiation, as occurred with the widow musical instrument string makers of Barcelona who, in 1660, had their right to continue with the family business recognised on the condition that they remained widows and received only half the guts – the material to make musical strings – that the guild distributed. In exchange, these widows were also able to continue with the workshop, even if they did not have male children who could first help them with the work and then become masters and manage the workshop (nothing was said about whether they could have apprentices or were obliged to hire an official).

Among the mobilisations of women in defence of their work that were traced, only one was added to the demands of other groups of workers: in 1692 the women who made ribbons with traditional looms in Barcelona filed a petition with their own arguments, which joined three other petitions: those of the silk weavers, the ribbonmakers and the velvet guild masters. However, the exclusively female protest of the wool spinner women of Barcelona of 1628 took place amid years of large protests in the entire wool sector of the city and these Barcelona women almost certainly also participated in the 1626 wool weavers' strike.³³

Little information is available on the arguments put forward in the petitions because only some are detailed in the documents or in the bibliography that

³² Jean-Louis Roch, "Femmes et métiers dans la région rouennaise au Moyen Âge," in *Tout ce qu'elle saura et pourra faire*, ed. Anna Bellavitis, Virginie Jourdain, Virginie Lemonnier-Lesage and Beatrice Zucca-Micheletto (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2015), 27.

³³ Carrera Pujal, *Historia política*, 2:171–72.

describes these cases. Nevertheless, it is clear that they could vary greatly. Some of the arguments that can be mentioned are from before the period under analysis, but they show that the labour demands of women go back to the Middle Ages. Thus, in Rouen in 1439, the *lingères en vieux*, who had had seven items of clothing confiscated by the new *lingères*, argued that their pieces were for their own use and that of their home. In 1480, the female veil weavers of Basel considered that the infringement was by those who bought or ordered the textiles and accepted that they were not authorised to weave. In 1497, the *chaperonnières* of Rouen put forward three reasons to separate from the tailors' guild: that the tailors did not do what the *chaperonnières* knew how to do; that the city's *lingères* were not subject to male authority, but rather to that of women; and that the seamstresses of Paris did not depend on the tailors' guild. The widow of the master swordsmith of Valencia proudly stated in 1511 that until then she had been a woman swordsmith and that she wanted to die a swordsmith.³⁴ She added that the guild, which had just banned childless widows from continuing with the marital business, did not have any right to consider that she could live off rent and therefore close the workshop. It is possible that the same arguments were put forward in the period under analysis, as in previous centuries. This is the case of the seamstresses of Palermo in 1628 who, when the tailors' guild wanted to integrate them and make them pay the corresponding fees, put forward two partly known arguments: first, that on being excluded from the guild they should not be required to pay the fees of guild members; second, that they only worked for their relatives and that they used second-hand fabrics and garments. The allegations of the women artisans of Barcelona, who were protected by the Women's Ordinance of 1636, sometimes differ greatly from those shown in this section, as will be explained in the following section. It should be stressed that, previously, the wool spinners of Barcelona introduced a very clear argument in 1628 in shouting "*Via fora fam!*" (Begone, hunger!) in front of the city hall, a clear reference to their task of managing the family household.

In short, despite the lack of information that can be found on the responses of women artisans to the aggression of guilds, to the position of the authorities on labour matters or to the harm caused to them by technological innovation, it is evident that at least from the mid-fifteenth century women embarked on various denunciations, petitions, lawsuits and street protests in different European cities in relation to labour issues. The episodes included in the Appendix show

³⁴ The case of Valencia in Ivan Martínez Araque, "Las mujeres trabajadoras en la industria de Valencia a finales del siglo XIV e inicios del XV," in *Las mujeres en la Edad Media*, ed. M. Isabel del Val Valdivieso and Juan Francisco Jiménez Alcázar (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2013), 222–23.

a chain of women's labour demands, only some links of which are known, however. Thus, in the early modern age, women not only mobilised collectively or individually due to the scarcity or high prices of food, or tax problems, or in defence of their property rights, or due to sexual abuse and to save their honour, as shown by various studies, but also for labour issues, a less well-known aspect on which this article focuses.

The Protests of Textile Women in Seventeenth-Century Barcelona

As can be seen in the Appendix, in the seventeenth century the women artisans of Barcelona undertook various actions to defend their work. These collective labour actions should be included within the city's institutional, economic and guild context.

Barcelona's guild system was gradually created and modified starting from the fourteenth century. It is calculated that there were around 70 guilds in the city in the seventeenth century, all of which were male, although some mixed guilds had existed previously.³⁵ There were as many as seven silk craft guilds: needle hatters (*barreters d'agulla*, from 1495), fringe makers (*perxers*, from 1509), silk weavers (*velers*, from 1533), velvet makers (*velluters*, from 1548), needle tape producers (*passamaners*, from 1572), silk thread twistors (*torcedors*, from 1619) and silk dyers (*tintorers de seda*, from 1619). As shall be shown, the borders between the rights of these guilds were fluid, leading to the emergence of conflicts and alliances.

The Barcelona guilds were under the jurisdiction of the city's government. In the event of a dispute, the litigants could take the case in the second instance to the Catalan Court (Reial Audiència de Catalunya). The government of the city of Barcelona was formed by a large assembly (Consell de Cent) and a group of five *consellers* (the city council), among which merchants had an important presence throughout the seventeenth century, while the textile artisans had a minor role.³⁶ It would seem that in sixteenth-century Barcelona, the city council

³⁵ Pere Molas, *Los gremios barceloneses del siglo XVIII* (Madrid: Confederación Española de Cajas de Ahorros, 1970), 254–256; Mireia Comas, Carme Muntaner and Teresa Vinyoles, "Elles no només filaven: Producció i comerç en mans de dones a la Catalunya baixmedieval," *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura* 56 (2008): 41–44.

³⁶ The core group of the *Consellers* was formed by representatives from five socioeconomic sectors, annually renewed through a system of drawing lots among those entitled to form part of the lists from each sector. Generally speaking, the first one was a representative of the city's nobility, the second one represented a lower level of nobility (*ciutadà honrat*), the third place was for the so-called doctors (men of law, physicians, etc), fourth place was reserved for a merchant, and fifth place was distributed between a skilled worker and a member of the college

tended to favour the interests of the guilds, and in the seventeenth century those of the traders, thus suggesting a certain decline in the influence of the guilds.³⁷

Like in other European cities, in Barcelona wool spinning and the production of some textile goods were mainly carried out by women, despite the fact that an important part of the activity of women was officially hidden in wage labour for some artisans or in work carried out in the family environment. Small trade, especially in the food market, care services and domestic service were also traditionally female activities. The manufacture of small textile garments was still a free production, without any guild controlling it. It was considered a means of subsistence for poor people, especially women, although there were different economic levels between them.

Western Europe in the seventeenth century was marked by a number of serious wars as well as political and economic problems. Barcelona, whose population increased from 30,000 to 35,000 inhabitants, suffered from different types of problems that convulsed the life of its people.³⁸ In this context, the textile guilds tried to maintain their pre-eminence through various actions, such as outsourcing certain processes³⁹ or reducing female activity. The women artisans from different economic sectors came into conflict with the guild masters on different occasions, as can be seen in the Appendix. The most frequent conflicts were due to two causes: first, the restriction of widowhood rights in different trades, which the women artisans opposed individually and collectively; and second, the attempt to reduce the female spaces for the independent and free production of small textile garments.

of arts. In the fifth place, the presence of textile artisans was always marginal: there was only a furrier in 1612 and 1620, 1640, a silk weaver in 1626 and a needle tape producer in 1641. The two sectors which could hold the position of fifth *Conseller* had for decades asked to have one representative from each sector. This demand was granted in 1652, in compensation for the contributions of the colleges and guilds to the war expenses. The representation of artisans was thus strengthened, although they remained a minority. James S. Amelang, *Honored Citizens of Barcelona: Patrician Culture and Class Relations, 1490–1714* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Amelang, “L’oligarquia ciutadana a la Barcelona moderna: una aproximació comparativa,” *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura* 13 (1983): 7–25; Bruniquer, 1:53.

³⁷ Pierre Vilar, *La Catalogne dans l’Espagne moderne: Recherches sur les fondements économiques des structures nationales*, 3 vols. (Paris: SEVPEN, 1962), 1:598. Carrera Pujal, *Historia política*, 2:171–72.

³⁸ Eva Serra-Puig, “La crisi del segle XVII a Catalunya,” *Butlletí de la Societat Catalana d’Estudis Històrics* 24 (2013): 297–315.

³⁹ Albert García Espuche, *Un siglo decisivo: Barcelona y Cataluña, 1550–1640* (Madrid: Alianza, 1998).

The resistance of some women to the hostility of the guilds and their defensive mobilisation received a momentous response from the city's government, which, in 1636, protected this free production of small textile garments with the enactment of the Ordinance in Favour of Women, which allowed women to exercise certain textile and clothing trades independently. With this measure, the city council intended to reduce poverty and social unrest, but at the same time it weakened the weight of the guilds and strengthened that of the traders. The 1636 ordinance became a legal argument used repeatedly in the conflicts raised by women in the defence of their right to produce and distribute their textile goods. This history is explained in parts below.

Filempueres in the Face of the Velers' Guild Attacks, 1633–1663

One of the activities of the women artisans of Barcelona was the free production and sale of small pieces of fine fabrics, or linen and silk veils (*filempues*), used by women to cover their head, and also to make underwear.⁴⁰ The silk weavers' guild (the *velers'* guild) wanted to reduce the economic space occupied by these women artisans, without recognising the rights that they had been granted by custom. From July 1633 to November 1635, at least, the officers of the *velers'* guild repeatedly confiscated the fabrics of the *filempueres*. These actions gave rise to an initial phase of conflicts between these women artisans and the city's *velers'* guild. As craft guilds were under city council jurisdiction, the injured women appealed to the local authorities to denounce the harassment by the guild and request the return of the confiscated garments. The municipal authorities repeatedly ordered the officers of the guild to return the merchandise to its owners.⁴¹

With the aim of curbing these attacks, this first phase of the conflict was resolved on 1 March 1636, when Barcelona's city authorities enacted the Ordinance in Favour of Women,⁴² which reinforced the right of women to

⁴⁰ AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 91 (1663–1664), fol. 18–18v. A notarial inventory mentions “*un enago de filempua*” (a petticoat made of this kind of linen or, in some cases, of silk textile). AHPB, Josep Llaurador, 1685, fol. 169. *Ratillos*, thin fabrics of linen and silk, were also used.

⁴¹ AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663), fol. 3–4; and Ex. 91 (1663–1664) (basically pts. 62, 63, 69). The first document is the transcription of the lawsuit promoted by the women and also contains the allegation of the *velers'* guild against the judgement in favour of the women; the second one is the transcription of the lawsuit promoted by the guild against the women. Both documents give information about previous conflicts: a confiscation on 22 July 1633, two on 25 August 1633, and one on 16 November 1635.

⁴² AHCB, Ordinacions, 03-1B.IV-29, fol. 78–79. Sometimes this Ordinance is known as the Ordinance on women, or the Ordinance on women's work.

engage in the production of small textile garments. The ordinance declared the right of women, unmarried, married or widowed, to produce by their own hands at least seven different kinds of textile items. The textiles mentioned were: veils made of hemp or linen (*filempues* and *ratillos*), all kinds of narrow ribbons and *tafetans* (narrow and coarse ribbons made of silk, linen or cotton), as well as buttons, to embroider *golillas* (a kind of collar), and stockings of silk or of any other kind with a needle. It also allowed women to sell them on their own, or through another person, in the town markets and urban squares. They were not, however, allowed to have their own shop to sell the items, this being reserved for the guild masters. With this ordinance, many women textile artisans, not only *filempueres*, secured an important economic role in the city, weakening the guilds' pre-eminence. While before some of the women sometimes secretly worked on their own, now they could make all these items in sight. The action of these women led to changes in the regulatory framework of female labour, and in this new framework women artisans acquired economic power that they would have to defend for decades.

The second phase of the conflict took place during the 1640–1652 war.⁴³ In 1650, the *velers'* guild once again confiscated goods from *filempueres*. Six women jointly denounced this move to the city council. The latter again ordered the immediate return of the confiscated pieces, although it appears that the guild appealed against the municipal judgement and they were not returned until January 1654.⁴⁴ The *velers'* guild was reluctant to accept the 1636 ordinance, and in 1656 filed a petition with the city council for it to apply only to poor women. It added a condition for its own benefit: that these women artisans should pay a fee of four *diners* for each *cana* (length measurement equivalent to eight spans) that they sold. The city council rejected the guild's petition.⁴⁵

A third phase of conflict began in 1658, when the *filempueres* protested against the new confiscations undertaken by the *velers'* guild: two in 1658 and 1659, and

⁴³ Catalonia confronted the Spanish monarchy in a civil war, during which Catalonia became French territory between 1641 and 1652 and, finally defeated, lost the territories of Cerdanya and Roussillon, which became French. See John H. Elliott, *The Revolt of the Catalans: A Study in the Decline of Spain (1598–1640)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963 and 1984).

⁴⁴ AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663), and the included Allegation of the *velers'* guild against the judgement (4 September 1663), fol. 2–5v; and Ex. 91 (1663–1664), fol. 14–15. The six women who acted collectively are mentioned: Mariàngela Llobeta, [?] Esteva, Magdalena Baduella, Maria Ferrera, Maria Pena and Maria Cayroca. Also, Capdeferro, "Mujeres y trabajo," 83, 96 (the documentary reference is AHCB, *Consellers*, XX-121, n. 24).

⁴⁵ AHCB, *Deliberacions*, 02.01-1BII-165, 16 February 1656.

several others in May 1661.⁴⁶ The latter involved ten *filempueres*, who denounced the harassment and received a favourable municipal judgement in that same year, which the guild did not comply with. In view of this noncompliance, in November 1661 the *filempueres* collectively filed a lawsuit against the *velers'* guild at the second instance before the Catalan Court (Reial Audiència).⁴⁷ This lawsuit concluded in November 1663, with a judgement that revalidated and extended the rights granted by the 1636 ordinance, the most important being that the women were no longer obliged to sell their goods only in the street and were authorised to go to the houses of their clients.⁴⁸ The silk weavers appealed the judgement, but the Reial Audiència rejected their arguments.⁴⁹

Tafetaneres against Three Silk Guilds, 1686

The attacks against women's work were repeated two decades after the *filempueres'* lawsuit, during the Catalan economic recovery, which some historians say began in the 1660s while others suggest it commenced later.⁵⁰ These attacks moved to another sector, that of the production of ribbons, an activity disputed by various silk guilds. Finally, once these guilds had come to an agreement, they tried to reduce independent female work. This first led to a conflict between three Barcelona silk-making guilds – the silk weavers' guild (*velers*), fringe makers (*perxers*) and velvet makers (*velluters*) – about who could produce and sell *tafetanets*, coarse narrow ribbons of 20 centimetres or less in width. The issue was resolved with an agreement approved by the three guilds,

⁴⁶ AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663), and Allegation (4 September 1663), fol. 2v–4; and Ex. 91 (1663–1664), fol. 14v. The women affected in 1658 and 1659 were Magdalena Spigó and Maria Amat.

⁴⁷ While the Castilian Court protected women by allowing them to file claims for free, we are unaware if the Catalan Court did the same.

⁴⁸ AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663). The complainants were: Magdalena Baduella (widow), Maria Nofre, Catherina Badia, Elisabeth Sima, Anna Vidala, Magdalena Rigual (married), Simona Rojals, Elisabeth Puig, Eulàlia Torras and Margareta Davesa. It is interesting to highlight that Magdalena Boadella, who headed the denunciation, already led the 1650 protest. Anna Vidala reappears in the 1692 protest. The November 1663 judgement is reproduced in AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 91 (1663–1664), fol. 1–4v. The new concessions were: 1. Women could enter the homes of potential buyers in order to sell their goods; 2. Women could spin raw materials or hire other women to spin or also buy yarn from whomever suits them best; 3. Women could commission a member of the city's *velers'* guild to work for them, providing them with the necessary thread.

⁴⁹ AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 91 (1663–1664), fol. 20–21.

⁵⁰ Pierre Vilar defined the period 1660–1705 as that of the second Catalan economic recovery. Vilar, *Catalogne*, 1: 638–70. Pere Molas put the dates back to 1680–1700.

signed on 9 July 1685, which granted the same authority to their members. The agreement ignored the traditional activity of women who made and sold *tafetanets* independently, but these women were targeted by the silk-making artisans. The guilds presented their agreement to the city council, proposing it be enacted as an ordinance. The ordinance was approved in December of the same year, with the explicit condition that it could not harm the rights established in other ordinances.⁵¹ This was the case of the 1636 ordinance and the 1582 *perxers'* ordinance.⁵²

Contravening this condition, the guilds embarked on a series of actions against the women who independently made and sold *tafetanets*. Thus, a few months later, in August 1686, the women artisans from this sector confronted a situation similar to that suffered previously by other female artisans. In this case, six widows, on behalf of other married and single women, complained to the city council that the officers of the three silk-making guilds had confiscated their *tafetanets* as well as lace and other garments.⁵³ The representatives of the three guilds justified their actions publicly in a document.⁵⁴ They alleged that they confiscated the goods because the women displayed their items at the entrance to their house, meaning they were visible from the street, like a shop, which the Ordinance in Favour of Women did not allow them to have, and they maintained that having a shop was an exclusive prerogative of the guilds, which for this reason had obligations and services with the city and with the king, such as paying fees and doing surveillance rounds when appropriate, obligations which the women artisans did not have. Moreover, they denounced the fact that the women not only worked with their hands, as authorised by the ordinance, but also had money, bought silk wholesale, had many looms in their houses and gave work to other people, while the guild members were experiencing difficulty in hiring apprentices and officials. They added that no one controlled the quality of the *tafetanets* that these women sold wholesale to several guild masters and to

⁵¹ AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-194, 5 and 26 November 1685.

⁵² Ordinances of *perxers* and *passamaners* allowing women to work in this trade, without being guild members or paying anything. AHCB, Ordinacions, 03-1B.IV-20, fol. 192v-195.

⁵³ AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-195, fol. 183v-184 (7 and 16 August 1686). Five widows – Eulàlia Serra, Magdalena Outet [?], Eulàlia Vilalba, Catharina Canyacabres and Maria Paguesa – led the supplication on behalf of other very poor women and young women (“*pobres miserable dones y donzellas*”).

⁵⁴ *Allegacio en fet dels medis*. We can almost certainly relate this document to the 1686 conflict, since both sources mentioned indicate the lawyers involved. The document is conserved in different archives, for example in the Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fullets Bonsoms, 2759.

the textile shops, thus cheating the buyers. In addition to trying to put an end to the ordinance, denouncing that it had not been correctly processed, the masters of the three guilds offered to give work to all the widows or married women who wanted to make *tafetanets* in accordance with the market price.

In response, in 1686 the city council agreed to strengthen the rights contained in the 1636 ordinance – which was extended in 1663, as already mentioned – and authorised the *tafetaneres* and other women affected by this ordinance to sell their production in their own house, although without displaying it at the door. It argued that this avoided the dangers represented by the women walking in the streets and squares of the city.⁵⁵ The 1686 decision represented one more step in the definition of the economic space of women artisans producing small textile garments. If they acquired the right to sell door-to-door with the 1663 extension, they now had authorisation to sell in their own houses.

Women and Men against the Engine Loom, 1692

The end of the sixteenth century saw a new defensive action by women artisans who made *tafetanets* and *vetas* (ribbons made of hemp or cotton) on their own account, or for other women artisans or for the masters of the three silk-making guilds – the silk weavers' guild (*velers*), fringe makers (*perxers*) and velvet makers (*velluters*) – although for different reasons to those that we have seen so far.

In 1690 – at a time of economic expansion⁵⁶ – the trader Francesc Potau introduced from abroad the engine loom, which could weave between 20 and 24 pieces at the same time. This new development affected the three silk-making guilds, the women and other people who did not belong to a guild but were entitled to manufacture lower-quality ribbons. In 1792, four petitions requesting a ban on this loom were submitted to the city council, one of them by the women artisans who wove ribbons and *vetas*. The other three were filed by each of the three guilds affected. All four petitions put forward very similar economic and moral reasons. On the one hand, they argued that the new loom left over 3,000 people without work, including women, boys and girls – as indicated in the petition by the women artisans – and that many of these women artisans without work would fall into sin (prostitution). They maintained that the engine loom was not in the public interest because the price of the ribbons made with it was only two *diners* cheaper per *cana* than that of those woven, one by one, with the

⁵⁵ AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-195, fol. 183v–184 (7 and 16 August 1686).

⁵⁶ Àlex Sánchez and Francesc Valls-Junyent, “Les crisis a Catalunya en una etapa de creixement i transició (1680–1840),” *Recerques: Història, Economia, Cultura* 72–73 (2016–2017): 119–70.

traditional loom. The officers of the three guilds stressed that the engine loom directly ruined many of the guild masters by taking work away from them, while also indirectly affecting the *tafetaneres*, who did not receive commissions from these artisans.⁵⁷ However, no one stopped the dissemination of the multiple-ribbon loom in the city.

The Protagonists, their Arguments and their Alliances

While we have some information about the *filempueres* and *tafetaneres* that fought to defend their right to work, it is difficult to identify the female leadership and to understand what qualities made them emerge, be they personal recognition, wit or daring. The *filempuera* Magdalena Boadella (sometimes Baduella) was involved in the repeated conflict between the silk weavers' guild and her combative colleagues from 1650 to 1654 and again in 1660. In 1661, now a widow, she led the judicial actions promoted by the independent *filempueres*, and her name is prominently quoted in documents. Ana Vidala was also involved in two of the conflicts, in 1661–1663 and 1692. We can assume that they gained the expertise, conviction and strength in the previous action to undertake new defensive actions. Unfortunately, no more information about them is known, and nothing exists on the other women artisan plaintiffs, despite a search of the municipal documentation. Nevertheless, it is likely that they undertook collective action because they knew each other personally.⁵⁸

Some – at times contradictory – signs allow us to make a minimum approximation of the economic status of these women. It can be supposed that these women artisans (widows, married and single women) certainly included rich women with a financial capacity and business spirit but also poor women artisans who worked for whomever asked them, giving them the raw material: for other women *tafetaneres* or for some guild masters.

⁵⁷ AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-201, 13 November 1692. The supplication of the *velers*, unnumbered page on fol. 310 and 311. The supplication of the female artisans was headed by Josepha Coll, Margarida Calveta and Mònica Mascaró and by the widows Madalena Cosoura, Marenciana Pareta, Inés Jofrenca, Margarida Vidala, Isabel Artigas, Maria Abril, Manuela Font and Isabel Posas (we are aware that an Anna Vidala led the lawsuit of 1661–1663). AHCB3-ACAMSB, Ex. 91 (1663–1664), fol. 20–21.

⁵⁸ Some studies have highlighted the fact that knowing each other personally increases the chances of success of collective action. See Tine De Moor, "The Silent Revolution: A New Perspective on the Emergence of Commons, Guilds, and Other Forms of Corporate Collective Action in Western Europe," in Lucassen, De Moor and van Zanden, "Return of the Guilds," 194.

The allegations in defence of the women artisans of Barcelona should be interpreted in terms of the argumentative strategies of each of the parties. Likewise, it should be taken into account that the patriarchal and educated writing of the judicial agents modified the voice of the women. There was continuity between the arguments of the *filempueres* in 1633–1663 and those of the *tafetaneres* in 1686, who based their defence on always having worked in their trade and thus having earned this right through tradition, and thanks to the Ordinance in Favour of Women, since its promulgation in 1636. In the 1686 conflict, the women artisans lodged their complaints on behalf of poor widows, married and single women, maybe to counter the arguments of the representatives of the three silk-making guilds, who insisted that independent work should only be allowed for poor women – widows or married women (but they did not mention single women) – to whom they offered to give work. The guild officials demanded recognition of their guild function to control product quality and the exclusive right to have a shop. The women artisans who protested at the end of the century, in 1692, against the introduction of the engine loom gave economic and moral reasons: they needed the work to maintain their household and family; they instructed their sons and daughters in the work; they avoided their own idleness and that of their sons and daughters, and they thus avoided offending God and, possibly, sinning out of need.

The protesting women artisans of Barcelona did not compare their situation with that of other Catalan or Spanish women and did not show signs of participating in a collective feeling of solidarity among female artisans from different trades or cities, as appears to have occurred in Rouen in 1497 when the *chaperonnières* wanted to separate from the tailors.⁵⁹

It should be stressed that the victory of the *filempueres* and *tafetaneres* of Barcelona in the seventeenth century against the silk-making guilds was possible because the municipal authorities took their side. This is partly explained by the social composition of the city council, that is, by the weight of the patriciate, which was interested in reducing – mainly female – poverty and spending on municipal welfare, as well as the weight of commercial representatives. There was a different coalition in the conflict at the end of the century, between the *tafetaneres* and the masters of the three silk-making guilds, since the introduction of the engine loom in 1690 threatened the work of everyone.

The introduction of the 1636 Ordinance in Favour of Women in Barcelona (and, above all, its confirmation and expansion in 1663 and 1686) occurred at almost the same time as the reform of the guilds in France, carried out by Jean-

⁵⁹ Roch, “Femmes,” 27.

Baptiste Colbert in 1673, which gave rise to the creation of female and mixed – always textile – guilds in different cities.

Conclusion

It is clear that, at least in the seventeenth century, the female artisans of Barcelona mobilised, individually or as a group, for labour reasons. They protested in different ways, and not just for reasons of sustenance or of a fiscal nature.

In seventeenth-century Barcelona, where there were no female or mixed guilds, women played a leading role in at least nine collective labour demand episodes, taking them to the city government, while other women submitted individual petitions. Four of the collective episodes were led by widows demanding continuity in the trade that they had exercised together in the workshop of their deceased husband – a butcher, a musical string maker (twice) and an *abaixador*. Another four episodes were led by widows, married or single women who were producers of small textile garments and who defended their work against the guilds' harassment or against the introduction of the engine loom, in 1692. Also, there was a protest before the city hall in 1628 that was repressed by the authorities. In addition, the *filempueres* embarked on a lawsuit in 1661 in the Catalan Court. According to the documentation drafted by the judicial agents, the *filempueres* who mobilised in 1633–1663 and the *tafetaneres* in 1686 insisted that they were entitled to exercise their trade through tradition and for the right granted to them by the 1636 ordinance. On the contrary, in 1692 the *tafetaneres* put forward economic and moral arguments in opposing the introduction of the engine loom, together with three silk-working guilds.

These collective protests were led by independent women artisans in the textile sector, one of the sectors which employed the most women, together with the small food trade and services. These women artisans worked independently and had different economic levels. Some of them gave work to other female artisans or even to guild masters, with the exception of the wage-earning spinners who protested in 1628. These mobilisations were part of a chain of labour demands, about which little is known, which can be traced back to the fifteenth century and which continued in the eighteenth century, as occurred in other European cities.

The individual first actions of the *filempueres* in 1633–1635 in defence of their work had consequences which went beyond their private or individual sphere, since in 1636 Barcelona City Council ordered a specific ordinance for certain female jobs, the Ordinance in Favour of Women. It is not clear whether there were similar regulations in other cities.

This regulation also benefited a further seven groups of female artisans who produced small textile garments. Women persisted in the defence of their

labour in the face of persistent attacks from the guilds. They thus succeeded in reaffirming their right to exercise their trade freely and in being able to sell their products, first in the houses of their clients (in 1663) and later in their own houses (in 1686), abandoning the obligation to sell in the streets and markets.

This victory was due to the fact that the city government of Barcelona and the Catalan Court protected independent female work throughout the seventeenth century. These institutions thereby combated idleness and poverty, reduced welfare expenditure, made the supply and labour market more flexible and weakened the guilds. In 1692, however, the *tafetaneres* changed allies by aligning themselves with the ribbon-making guilds that were also threatened by the introduction of the engine loom.

The protagonists of the actions of this article made decisions about their life, controlling it as far as possible. Their action can be inscribed in the concept of female agency. The labour demands of the female artisans of Barcelona in the seventeenth century, although they did not alter the dominant patriarchal system, helped to redefine gender codes in the short term, stopping male attacks against women's independent work.

University of Barcelona

APPENDIX

ACTIONS BY EUROPEAN WOMEN IN DEFENCE OF THEIR WORK, 1430–1692

Town	Year or century	Kind of women's work	Number of women	Kind of action	Facts	Result	Source
Strasbourg	1430	Veil weavers	4	Denunciation to the court	Refused to pay fee to guild	Court decided in their favour	Simon-Muscheid, "La lutte," 387
Rouen	1439	<i>Lingères en vieux</i>	Several	Denunciation	Confiscation of pieces by <i>lingères en neuf</i>		Broomhall, "The Fragility"
Basel	1450	Veil weavers	Several	Denunciation to the court	Refused to pay fee to guild	Decision in their favour	Simon-Muscheid, "La lutte," 387
Rouen	1497–1504	<i>Chaperonnières</i>	Several	Lawsuit before the <i>Échiquier</i>	To be under tailors' guild's control	In 1497 they obtained their own guild	Roch, "Femmes," 27
Barcelona	August 1510	Knitwear weavers	Several widows	Petition to city council	To maintain a shop	City council authorisation	<i>Bruniquer</i> , 5:218
Bilbao	April 1510	Sardine sellers	19	Peaceful confrontation with city council	About where to sell	Obtained right to sell in the square	Del Val, "La historia," 30
Valencia	1511	Childless widow of a swordsmith	1	Legal action	Refused to close workshop		Martínez Araque, "Las mujeres," 223–24
Rouen	1541	Resellers of clothes	2	Hired a lawyer to defend their right to work	Against being pursued and fined by female guild of garment drapers		Broomhall, "The Fragility"
Rouen	1586	<i>Lingères</i>	19	Protested/ fined/ defended their cause before the court	On distribution of market stalls		Broomhall, "The Fragility"

Rouen	Sixteenth century	Ribbonmakers' – fringemakers' – lacemakers' guild		Legal action	Against female guild of knitters	Victory	Hafters, <i>Women</i> , 116
Palermo	1628	Silk weavers	Several	Legal action	Refused to pay fee to silk weavers' guild	Victory	Lombardo, "Guilds," 118
Zaragoza	1628	Ribbon makers	Several		Protest over working conditions		Ortega, "El periodo," 339
Barcelona	March 1628	Wool spinners	More than 40	Protest in front of city hall	Opposed taking wool out of town to be spun	Some women fled and others were imprisoned	AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-137, fol. 49–50
Barcelona	July and August 1633–November 1635/March 1636	Silk weavers (<i>filempueres</i>)	Several	Petition to city council/demanded return of confiscated garments	Confiscation of garments	City council ordered return of merchandise (1633)/City council enacted Ordinance in favour of women (March 1636)	AHCB, Ordinacions, 03-1B. IV-29, fol. 78–79; AHCB3-CAMSB, Ex. 90 (1661–1663) and 91 (1663–1664)
Barcelona	April 1634	Butchers	Several widows	Petition to city council	To maintain a shop	City council authorised them, whether they had children or not, to keep name of husband	<i>Bruniquer</i> , 5: 230
Barcelona	1645	Musical instrument string makers (<i>corderes de viola</i>)	Several widows	Petition to city council	Certain guild masters wanted to prevent them from continuing with marital workshop	City council decided in women's favour	<i>Bruniquer</i> , 5:235; Vicente, "Mujeres artesanas," 69

Barcelona	January 1650	<i>Filempueres</i>	6 women	Petition to city council	The return of their confiscated textiles	City council ordered return	AHCB3-CAMSB, Ex. 90 and Ex. 91; Capdeferro, “Mujeres y trabajo,” 96
Barcelona	May 1650	<i>Abaixadores*</i>	Several widows	Petition to city council	To practise craft of dead husbands	City council authorisation	<i>Bruniquer</i> , 5:238
Barcelona	November 1660	Musical instrument string makers (<i>corderes de viola</i>)	Several widows	Petition to city council	To continue marital shop	City council authorisation with conditions	<i>Bruniquer</i> , 5:244
Barcelona	May 1661	<i>Filempueres</i>	10 women	Petition to city council	The return of confiscated textiles	City council ordered return	AHCB3-CAMSB, Ex. 90 and Ex. 91
Barcelona	1661–1663	<i>Filempueres</i>	10 women	Lawsuit before Catalan Court (Reial Audiència) against <i>velers</i> ’ guild	The return of confiscated textiles and authorisation to make their craft	Catalan Court decided in favour of the women/ reinforcement of 1636 Ordinance	AHCB3-CAMSB, Ex. 90 and Ex. 91
Barcelona	August-1686	Ribbon makers (<i>tafetaneres</i>)	5 widows on behalf of more women	Petition to city council	Officers of three guilds confiscated their merchandise	City council ordered return/ Reinforcement of 1636 Ordinance	AHCB, Deliberacions, 02.01-1BII-195, fol. 183v–184; <i>Bruniquer</i> , 5:261
Barcelona	November 1692	Women handmade ribbon artisans	11 women (7 were widows)	Petition to city council	To ban engine loom		AHCB, Deliberacions 02.01-1BII-201
Paris	Seventeenth century	Seamstresses’ guild		Legal action	Against the tailors’ guild and other opponents that ignored their rights		Crowston, <i>Fabricating</i> , 226–30

* Artisan women that cleaned, softened and finished the treatment of animal leather.