



*Multilingualism, Lingua Franca and Translation in the
Early Modern Period*

LANGUAGE DYNAMICS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Edited by Karen Bennett and Angelo Cattaneo



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11 Linguistic Expression of Power and Subalternity in Peixoto's *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina* (1741)

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Introduction

Antonio da Costa Peixoto's 1741 manuscript *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina* ("New work on the general language of Mina") documents a variety of Gbe (sub-group of Kwa languages) spoken by slaves in the Brazilian city of Vila Rica (today Ouro Preto) in the eighteenth century, which Peixoto called *Língua Geral de Mina* (abbreviated here to LGM). This language, brought from overseas by enslaved West Africans, is one of the many vernaculars thought to have already disappeared in colonial Brazil. However, this eighteenth-century document, and today's reality, prove otherwise. In fact, the transatlantic linguistic link between the lexical material documented in Peixoto's manuscript and modern Fon (and also Ewe) is still present. Yeda Pessoa de Castro explains that, out of the 920 lexical entries in the manuscript, 755 have been recognised by the speakers of Fongbe (the majority ethnic language of the country of Benin), while 76 others have been identified as Mahi or Gun and 11 more as Ewe (Castro, 2022 forthcoming).¹ Vestiges of the *Língua geral de Mina*, can also be found in the vocabulary used by Afro-Brazilian religious communities identifying themselves as Mina-Jêje (Cobbinah *et al.*, 2022 forthcoming), an ethnic label that combines and blurs distinct West African origins from areas of modern Ghana, Benin and Nigeria (Castro 2002; Märzhäuser and Samla, 2022 forthcoming).

Peixoto's *Obra Nova* is essentially a glossary of terms supplemented by short dialogues in LGM with translations to Portuguese. It is interesting not only from the linguistic point of view but also socioculturally, since the scenes represented in the dialogues reflect the contradictory interests of different social agents, and the complexity of their interactions. Several dialogues in the glossary testify to a degree of agency on the part of the Africans that undermines conventional representations of colonial relations.² In the complex socio-economic setting of eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, a considerable number of slaves managed to buy their freedom and engaged in small trades, as many dialogues about economic interactions illustrate. There were *escravos de ganho* (slaves who were

able to make some money for themselves)³ and quite a few *forros* (liberated or free-born slaves) who achieved economic independence, social status and power. Among these were many women, especially so-called *negras de tabuleiro* (literally “negresses of the trays”, who sold food and drink on the street), and *negras das vendas* (who owned or worked at small shops), and whose social position gave them a certain bargaining power in the mining society (Almeida, 2010; Gonçalves, 2011).

This chapter is organised as follows. Key information about the manuscript and its author is given in sections 2 and 3. Section 4 provides the sociohistoric context for our analysis of the power relations in the complex multi-ethnic, multilingual slaveholding society of Minas Gerais during the gold rush era, power relations that were constantly being renegotiated within the sphere of individual biographies. Section 5 looks at key terms for the ethnically structured social hierarchy, social status and spaces, and dialogues describing acts of state control, incidents of violence and intimate gender relations, which capture, to some extent, an otherwise invisible discourse. Section 6 discusses how structural superiority (Portuguese, male) and subalternity (African or of African descent, and especially women) were renegotiated in the micro-situations described and ends with some broader reflections about *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina*. Apart from the power dynamics reconstructed from the glossary’s content, the re-negotiation of power and subalternity are also reflected in the facts that (i) Peixoto clearly acquired – and recommends that his fellow Europeans acquire – the African language in order to keep social peace in Minas Gerais and (ii) his (possibly female) African informants were not necessarily poorer than he was, a Portugal-born countryside clerk (Araujo, 2013, 2022 forthcoming).

Both findings go against “prototypical” colonial imagery. The fact that Peixoto learned and recommended learning the Gbe-variety *Língua Geral de Mina* can be interpreted as an attempt to draw closer to the other. This linguistic approximation by a white man towards a demographically dominant and socially heterogeneous African population group, like many of the contents of the *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina*, reflects Spivak’s observation that “the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive” (Spivak, 1994: 66).

Manuscripts

Two original handwritten manuscripts of Antonio da Costa Peixoto’s have been preserved. There is a shorter version, dating from 1731, entitled *Alguns apontamentos da Língua Mina com as palavras Portuguesas correspondentes* (“Some notes on the Mina language with the corresponding Portuguese words”), kept in Portugal’s National Library in Lisbon, and an extended version from 1741, *Obra Nova de Língua*

Geral de Mina, stored in the Évora Public Library.⁴ The 1741 version was intended for publication in print and sale, but it was never published during Peixoto's lifetime.⁵

The 42-page-long, 11.5 × 11 cm booklet of the 1741 manuscript contains 899 lexical entries, complex expressions and dialogues from different semantic domains relating to the gold trade and everyday life (body parts, food and agriculture, human interaction, and so forth) in LGM with their Portuguese translations,⁶ preceded by a dedication, a prologue to the reader, and an “Advertencia” (“Warning”) at the end of the glossary, which informs the reader about variations in the pronunciation of <ch>.⁷ The paratexts also allow us to suppose that Peixoto sent his manuscript to Lisbon to be printed, as there was a ban on printing press in Portuguese America at the time.⁸

In the paratexts of *Obra Nova de Língua Geral de Mina*, Peixoto twice calls his glossary a “nova tradução” (“new translation”, 1741: 3, 5), which could imply either “something recently done anew” (“coisa feita de pouco tempo a esta parte”, Bluteau, 1716: 760), or a “new work that so far no one has tried” (“obra nova ...que até agora ninguém tentou”, Bluteau, 1716: 760).⁹ Peixoto thus seems to be suggesting that he is offering something hitherto unknown, although some of his countrymen probably knew about Peixoto's familiarity with LGM and his 1731 attempt to compile a glossary. Moreover, his quite unusual commitment to spreading knowledge about LGM in written form was unlikely to have remained unknown in a society where very few could read and write. We thus interpret his use of the adjective “novo” as part of Peixoto's attempt to advertise a volume he hoped to sell in print soon.¹⁰ But the manuscript never came back from Portugal in printed form¹¹ and did not bring its author the additional income he had hoped for.

Biographic information on the author

Antonio da Costa Peixoto

On the title page, Peixoto is described as a “national of the Kingdom of Portugal, of the Province of Entre-Douro-e-Minho, of the county of Felgueiras”.¹² This has allowed Araujo (2013, 2022 forthcoming) to reconstruct many aspects of Peixoto's biography by combining archival data and documents from both Portugal and Brazil with an attentive historical-cultural contextualisation.

Thus, we know that Antonio da Costa Peixoto was born in 1703 in Lamas, according to his certificate of baptism from the Church of S. Pedro de Torrados dating from 23 March 1703. He migrated to Brazil presumably as a 12 or 13 year old in 1716, heading for the gold-mining region of Minas Gerais. He lived in different settlements around the region's main town, Vila Rica, and worked as a writing clerk (*escrivão*) and municipal judge (*juíz de vintena*) from 1736 until his death.¹³

He died on 19 September 1763 in Casa Branca, leaving a will, which shows that he had four (illegitimate) children by different mothers, but no possessions (Araujo, 2013: 4, 2022 forthcoming).

An especially interesting aspect of his biography is the fact that his career in colonial administration was interrupted, when he worked in the municipality of S. Bartolomeu, because he was publicly scolded for socialising with the African population of Minas Gerais. A letter sent to Vila Rica's city council by the village's inhabitants dated 18 February 1741 led to his dismissal on the grounds that "he is not capable of serving the office, because he is a man who drinks and gets drunk on *cachaça*, and frequents the taverns with black women and men".¹⁴ Despite this scandal (or attempt at blackmail), Peixoto managed to regain his administrative position, and from 16 February 1743 to 19 September 1763 was assigned to three municipalities: S. Bartolomeu, S. Antonio da Casa Branca, N. Sra. de Nazaré da Cachoeira do Campo. As reconstructed by Araujo, he was in good relations with Vila Rica's city council and important members of the local (European) community and was even a member of local Catholic fraternities (*irmandades religiosas*). He also maintained relations with local Africans and Afro-descendants, especially women. As already mentioned, historical documents prove that at least two of his four children had black mothers (a typical pattern in colonial Brazil, especially in Minas Gerais), who were both freed slaves (*forras*). His reference to female informants in his glossary offers evidence of his close contacts with African women; indeed, his intimate relations clearly played a role in the production of the more sexually explicit parts of his *Obra Nova*.

Given the multifaceted structure of this mining society, where the Africans were in the majority (though political and economic power clearly resided with the Portuguese), to speak LGM would have been an advantage for a white person in local administration, as well as in the local and regional trade networks (and probably even in the transatlantic gold, tobacco and slave trade).

To understand how and why a Portugal-born clerk engaged with the local Gbe-speaking community to such degree that he could transcribe all this linguistic information – and even (partly) acquire the language,¹⁵ we need to know more about the sociohistoric context. Within this context, it also becomes clearer how his ideas about social control and crime prevention, and inter-ethnic relations, made him invest so much time and effort in producing this manuscript.

Sociohistoric context

From the time of Prince Henry the Navigator and the Portuguese explorations along the African coast in the first half of the fifteenth century, slavery was officially authorised by the Portuguese Crown. It

was justified by the “just war theory” (*Bellum iustum* or *ius ad bellum*), which sanctioned war against the “unfaithful”, permitting the taking of prisoners to be converted into Christians. Already in medieval times, it had been considered legitimate to wage war against and enslave Muslims, especially when captured in battle. However, from the fifteenth century onwards, under the influence of Prince Henry, Portugal officially turned into a slave-trading kingdom.

By the first two decades of the eighteenth century, there were about 30,000 slaves in Minas Gerais, but numbers exploded in subsequent decades, with most slaves being born on African soil.¹⁶ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the population of this *capitania* was over 70% African and mestizo; more precisely, in 1786 out of ~350,000 inhabitants, nearly 300,000 were black (Castro, 2002: 49–50). Though this was a socially coercive system, it was also susceptible to acquisitions, resistance, accommodation, negotiations, and social pacts. It is known, for example, that slaves were able to set up families, including marrying in church, and that they could acquire significant material assets, including access to land for cultivation and a house that was differentiated from the collective slave quarters known as “*senzalas*”.¹⁷

Peixoto considers that LGM is “important knowledge” (“*importante sabedoria*”, 1741: 5), and describes its usefulness explicitly in his introduction: if slaveholders, and even those colonialist that didn’t own them, knew LGM, it would be possible to avoid many of the “insults, wrongs, robberies, deaths [...] and atrocities”¹⁸ that happened in the colony. Peixoto opines that LGM would facilitate communication between masters and slaves and thereby help control subordinates and avoid frequent tumults and violent incidents.

Institutions of colonial power and their representatives followed the logic of “social disciplining” (*Sozialdisziplinierung*, Oestreich, 1969) in order to ensure greater control of all members of society and the effectiveness of policies in the interest of the Portuguese Crown. Propertied classes (both local Brazilian and those acting between the kingdom and the colony), gold seekers and local traders operated along economic logic. Subaltern groups of Africans and Afro-descendants strived for (more) freedom and for socio-economic advancement. As a village clerk, Peixoto surely knew about the necessity of mediating between these different groups.

In the dedication at the beginning of his manuscript, Peixoto highlights its usefulness by mentioning the various friends and interested parties that had asked him to write it.¹⁹ He particularly singles out a certain Sergeant-Major Antonio de Souza Coimbra, to whom he explicitly dedicates the work. Although he acknowledges the limits of his knowledge – typical false modesty in a text part serving as *captatio benevolentiae* – Peixoto seems proud and convinced about the great utility of his glossary in Minas Gerais.

Peixoto's intellectual contribution, from which he also hoped to achieve direct economic profits, can be understood in this context as a tool for better control of the black population, and therefore, for more efficient management of human and economic resources.²⁰ Since every disturbance or revolt, however brief, would obviously damage the local economy and, consequently, the collection of taxes by the officials of the Kingdom of Portugal, Peixoto seems to have believed that his manuscript would be welcomed by both local authorities and the Lisbon Court.

However, the text was never printed, and colonial language policies soon changed. Just one decade after Peixoto tried to print his *Obra Nova*, the all-powerful Marquis de Pombal, chief minister of King Joseph I (1750–1777), imposed a Portuguese-only policy, corresponding to the idea of Brazil as a rationally organised, unified state to which multilingualism was considered an obstacle.²¹ This policy was originally directed at indigenous Brazilians and the Jesuits' *Língua Geral* and did not immediately affect the slaves, whose African languages were not explicitly mentioned in the plan.²² But the drive to learn other languages – something that had been diligently pursued before by religious orders like the Jesuits – now disappeared. Thus, Peixoto's manuscript arrived at the Lisbon court at a bad time.

Furthermore, a look at the content of this work shows that the logic of social control and self-defence against transgression by slaves and runaways with which Peixoto advertised his *Obra Nova* is only one position represented. In a number of the dialogues, power and subalternity seem to be negotiated between the various factions, as we shall see in the next section.

Power and subalternity in *Obra Nova* de *Língua Geral de Mina*

In this section, we discuss some of the terms mentioned in Peixoto's *Obra* and their sociocultural significance. They are divided into: (a) Entries relating to ethnicity, legal status, official functions and social spaces representing the colonial social structure; (b) Dialogues about the slave trade, state control and raids against whites showing different structural and situational aspects of violence and (c) Entries relating to the exercise and negotiation of power within a framework of inter-gender relations.

Ethnic terms, legal status, official functions and social spaces

In colonial Brazil, a person's legal status was closely linked to their ethnicity, skin colour and possessions. The ethnic categories employed in colonial Portuguese historiographic texts were first catalogued in the early nineteenth century work, *Discrição da Capitania de Minas Gerais* (ca. 1807) by António de Araújo e Azevedo, first Conde de Barca:

The non-European inhabitants of the *Capitania* and their descendants: blacks brought over from Africa; mulattos or *pardos* descending from a European father and an African mother; *cabras*, who are the children of a mulatto father and an African mother, or vice versa; blacks born in the country called creoles: and mestizos of a European father and an American mother or vice versa.²³

In Peixoto (1741), ethnic/racial terms include *hibàbouno* and *gauheno*, both translated as *branco* (“white person”), *hibàbouce* = *molher br.^{ca} ou Snar*. (“white woman or lady”) and *hibàboubi* = *menino br.^{co}* (“white child”)²⁴; *Bõbi* = *mulato, ou mulata* (“mulatto”) (1741: 11) and *vigidòdé* = *crioulo, ou crioula* (“creole”) (1741: 11–12) for people of mixed race; *melamdutô* = *carijô* (1741: 12) referring to enslaved indigenous people,²⁵ and, for Africans, the African ethnic terms *guno* = *gente mina* (“Mina people”), *aglono* = *g.^{te} Angolla* (“Angolan people”) and *gamlimno* = *gente cõbû* (1741: 12).²⁶

The social structure is also reflected in spatial terms, including terms that include a reference to ethnicity. Official institutions include *Avódumchuhê* = *Igreja* (“church”), *achósuchuhê* = *palacio* (“palace”) and *gamchòme* = *cadeya* (“prison”) (Peixoto, 1741: 13). As for the ethnic divide, we find the central terms *hibabouno chòme* = *caza de branco* (“house of white man”) and *acruchòme* = *senzalas* (“slaves’ quarters”). These reflect the typical division of a slaveholding household in colonial Brazil.²⁷

As for the signs of African agency in local trade, especially by females working as *negras de tabuleiro* or *negras das vendas* (mentioned above), these activities produced considerable wealth for some members of the black community. LGM was used in trade interactions, as the numerous dialogues about trade in the glossary confirm.

Quite surprisingly, in the glossary we also find the phrase *hibáaboutó mématimagu am* = *terra de branco não tem guerra* (“white mans’ land does not have war”), which may be understood as an indirect reference to the unstable situation in West Africa, where numerous groups and states were engaged in violent conflicts over power and territory – financed and armed, to a considerable degree, by the transatlantic slave trade.

The legal status of Africans and Afro-descendants included terms referring to slaves, to those that had been freed (*forro*, *afforado*), and to the free-born, but who were not “full” members of the Portuguese kingdom. In the manuscript, besides *mese sim* = *canhanbollas* (“escaped slaves”) and *mebubû* = *g.^{te} fugida, ou perdida* (“people who fled or are lost”) (Peixoto, 1741: 16), we find a series of expressions providing answers to the question “Who is your master?” (*men cru hauhê* = *q.^m hé teu senhor*): *methómereu ame* = *eu sou forro*²⁸ (“I am freed”), *snor. fuão. cruàme* = *eu sou do s.^r fuão* (“I belong to Mr. So and so”) and

bihàbouce dè cruàme = eu sou escravo de hua molher (“I’m a woman’s slave”)²⁹ (Peixoto, 1741: 17).

In order for a free or freed black person to prove their legal status and be allowed to circulate independently, they would have to present a written document called a *escripto*, as shown in this dialogue:

guisi = tu andas fugido (“Are you a runaway?”)

humsi = ando fugido (“I am runaway”)

masihâ = não· anda [...] fugido não· (“I’m not a runaway”)

sóbá huhema mápom = mostra o escripto p.^a ver (“Show me your document so I can see”)

huhema matim = não· tenho escripto (“I don’t have the document”), and neither the explanation *huhema hébú = perdi o escripto* (“I lost the document”) nor

huhema hejâhi = cabüeme o escripto (“The document fell down”) are convincing enough to avoid the legal consequences:

guácheguima tim huhema, ná blauhê = se não· tens escripto hei de amarrarte (“If you don’t have the document, I will have to arrest you” (Peixoto, 1741: 16–17).

The scene ends with detention. The enforcement of state control needed local agents, and the *Obra Nova* also mentions some of the official positions in the colonial regime: *Achósû = governador* (“local governor”), *achólupê = soldados* (“soldiers”) and *megulitô = capp.^m do mato ou meirinhos* (the first Portuguese term, *capp.^m do mato*, refers to a low-ranking military officer charged with hunting down slaves and, often violently, taking and enforcing legal decisions on the spot, while *meirinho* refers to a more prestigious administrative position in the judicial system) (all three terms in Peixoto, 1741: 12).³⁰ We also find *mâhigamchôme = vou p.^a a cadeya* (“I’m being put into prison”, 1741: 20). The behaviour of those responsible for enforcing the law, as well as slaveholders, was often cruel and violent, and the physical violence of whites against slaves black is very explicit, as reflected in the entry *hi hà bouno, hé nachuhê acru susû = os br.^{cos} castigão m.^{to} os escravos* (“whites punish slaves a lot”, 1741: 29).

Dialogues on the slave trade and violence

Reference to different forms of violence is made in the *Obra Nova*. First, there is mention of state power against runaway slaves/criminals, reflected in the expressions *mâhigulimesesim = vou amarrar canhanholas* (“I will arrest runaways”, Peixoto, 1741: 22). Second, explicit mention of slave trade, as an inherently violent practice, is made in the lists of parallel expressions about selling and buying goods: *mâhisáacru’hibô = vou vender negros novos* (1741: 23) and

máhichóacru'hibõ = *vou comprar negros novos* (“I will sell/buy new black people”) and *máhichóhinhono* = *vou comprar hũa negra* (“I will buy a black woman” (1741: 23). Besides slaveholding Europeans, free(d) blacks could also possess slaves, and female slave owners (as mentioned above) included *forras*, i.e. free African or Afro-descendant women.³¹

Besides these attestations of inherent structural violence, general reference to violence is made with *Aguam* = *guerra* (“war”, 1741: 23) and *megutõ* = *matador de gente* (“killer of people”, 1741: 19), the latter term following the short *dialogue mé nabi huguhi* = *q.^{tas} pessoas matastes* (“How many people did you kill?”) answer: *magu mérehã* = *nãõ· matey ninguem* (“I didn’t kill anyone”) or alternatively *humgu meru pou* = *matey hua pessoa* (“I killed one person”, 1741: 19).

Dialogues involving violence in which the relations of power and subalternity crystallise or shift include those relating to violence and crime against whites: *mesesim efim aquachepou* = *os canhanbolas furturamme o meu ouro todo* (“The runaway slaves stole all my gold”, 1741: 27). The danger for white people becomes visible in a dialogue (1741: 33–35), which begins:

Magubi hi habouno = *matemos este Brancoll*(“Let’s kill this white man”) [...]

Preg.^{to}, anihutũ nágume = *e porque rezãõ· me quereis matar* (“Why do you want to kill me?”)

miná hinum poupouthõhẽ = *queremos lhe tomar tudo* (“We want to take everything you have”)

hinum poupou [...] *mágumehã* = *tomay tudo e nãõ· me mateis* (“Take everything but don’t kill me”)

hégubéthóhéhi-nhõ = *tem m.^{ta} rezãõ·* (“You are very right”).

So in the dialogue, the white victim begs for his life successfully and tries to build trust saying *nhimáhinháram nácruhã* = *eu nãõ· sou ruim p.^a os escravos* (“I don’t treat slaves badly”) – though this doesn’t seem very convincing to his attackers, who reply *guidómórufidim* = *você diz histo aqui agora* (“You only say this now and here”). Although he insists (*humdómó tou pou pou me* = *eu digo o mesmo em q.^{al} q.^r p.^{te}*, i.e. “I say the same thing everywhere”), the dialogue ends with a negation of inter-ethnic solidarity: *mipoupou mähichomto* = *nos nãõ· somos todos am.^{os}, ou camaradas* (“We are not all friends and comrades”, and finally *Responde, mesesim matim hi há bouno hã* = *os canhanbollas nãõ· tem am.^{os} Brancos* (“Answers, Runaway slaves don’t have white friends”). The use of solidarity terms like *avódum chomto* = *comp.^e, ou comadre* (“male or female compadre”) or *chomto* = *amigo, ou camarada* (“friend or comrade”, 1741: 12) in inter-ethnic relations and friendships has to be further researched.

African women, sexual violence and intimate relations

As *negras minas ricas*, rich African ladies running slave-based trades and services, represented only one end of the social hierarchy for African women or those of African descent. Forced prostitution, sexual and physical attacks and abuse in slavery were characteristic of the slave women's lot in this male-dominated mining community. As Spivak states, "The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this [i.e. colonial] context. Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get in the three ways" (1994: 90).

The *Obra Nova* contains a number of disrespectful LGM expressions for women,³² including *coisa* ("thing"), as in (1741: 35) *Anunhatõ cri cri* ("You'(re a) bad, vulgar thing"); *anunhatõ veo* ("You'(re a) disgraced thing, you disgraced"), *anóhíhófou* ("You thing, get undressed"), *anunhatõ angalito plou plou* ("You thing, get undressed"). Peixoto also includes *hubádumi* ("Come and eat me, fuck me") to solicit sexual intercourse, and also *hubádumi chuchũ* ("Come and eat me, you leprous dog"), where "leprous dog" is obviously directed at a male, indicating that the agency expressed by the other participant of the conversation is equally disrespectful. All expressions were very likely used in the context of prostitution.

Due to gender demographics, sexual intercourse and intimate relations between African women and European men were frequent,³³ a topic about which Peixoto is surprisingly explicit, as we can see in the following dialogue:

Nóhé name ayó parê = mai dame hũ bocado de conoll ("Give me a little bit of your cunt")
fibá náhiná nauhê = aónde/hó hey de hir darll ("Where should I give it to you")
hubà mi hi zume = vamos p.^a o matoll ("Let's go to the woods")
zumehé mihom = o mato está humidoll ("The woods are wet")
hubà mi hi zamgi = vamos p.^a a camall ("Let's go to the bed")
hu hà mi hi = vamosll ("Let's go") (Peixoto, 1741: 40).

The decision to have sex seems to be consensual in this dialogue. Especially when the women were *fornas*, inter-ethnic heterosexual relations were less imbalanced in terms of power and might also yield long(er)-term and more stable relationships which also provided financial benefits.

Regarding the financial transactions involved in prostitution, the glossary includes advice on how to trick a woman into bed without paying. Peixoto introduces the following dialogue with *Cá melhor praxe de que eu uzo, algumas vezes, hé esta* ("This is the best strategy, which I sometimes use"):

Nhi matim aquhédimhã = eu não· tenho agora ouro ("At this moment, I don't have gold").

mématim aquhé má hóhayò hâ = q.^m naõ· tem ouro, naõ· fode
 (“Those who don’t have gold won’t fuck”).

name ayo dim, beré sù ná nauhé aquhé = dame agora o cono, eq.^{al}
q.^r dia te darey o ouro (“Give me your cunt now, I’ll give you the
 gold another day”) (Peixoto, 1741: 41).

But the lady reinforces her business policies: *nhimá ná ayóche achó hâ = eu naõ· dou o meu cono fiado* (“I won’t give my cunt on credit”). If we consider this negotiation from a gender perspective, it is the woman who is in control of the situation.

For *minas forras* (free African women of Mina origin), prostitution was an (additional) source of income, in addition to selling agricultural products and *cachaça* (brandy) in their (heavily taxed) *vendas* (shops). Because these female businesses to some extent followed West African patterns of women-controlled finance (see Farias 2019), a number of African women were able to accumulate considerable wealth. Besides these dialogues about sex, Peixoto includes a wide number of entries on family issues (pregnancy, childbearing, baptism). His interest in these issues is understandable given that he had daughters in Cachoeira and S. Bartolomeu by *negras forras* (free(d) African women), and two other children also probably of African mothers.

What these dialogues show is that, although being black and female was usually associated with double subaltern status, producing atrocious situations of sexual and physical exploitation and violence, and with de-structured family relations, some African women managed to move up the socio-economic hierarchy and renegotiate their subaltern status.

Final reflections: Renegotiating the subaltern in socio-economic relations, violence and sex

Looking at the micro-level of inter-ethnic interactions represented in the dialogues from the *Obra Nova da Língua Geral de Mina*, it is clear that power positions were negotiated and frequently shifted. Despite its declaredly “control-oriented” intention, the manuscript provides multiple examples of African agency, challenging racially based socio-economic patterns and power relations, where being “black” was associated with being enslaved and poor.

Alongside the micro-incidents between “blacks” and “whites” represented in Peixoto’s *Obra Nova*, the work also sheds light on the socio-economic logic of solidarity and competition between people from different social groups (as regards gender, ethnicity, legal status, fortune and religion) in Minas Gerais’ colonial social structure. Questions such as how and with whom different people would fraternise and under what circumstances have been investigated by Araujo (2022 forthcoming), using documents by or mentioning Antonio da Costa Peixoto.

In this context of complex alliances, animosities, and threats, Peixoto chose to employ LGM apparently as a means of inter-ethnic and inter-gender communication. To interact in LGM with members of African communities as a European-born member of Minas Gerais society was helpful considering his administrative position and probably boosted his professional ascent.

From this perspective, then, we can interpret Peixoto's efforts to acquire and describe LGM as a strategy on the part of a "white" member of society to secure his own position through the successful control of (but also winning the trust of and cultivating good relations with) members of the local black community. However, it is also clear from his work that these communicative and intimate "borders" were by no means stable. Race relations were clearly very fluid in the context of this mining society, and race was only one relative factor contributing to socio-economic position and social ascension. This becomes especially visible in the intimate relations between European men and African women.

Notes

1. See Rodrigues (2003), Petter and Fiorin (2008).
2. As put forward in Gayatri Spivak's seminal article 'Can the subaltern speak?' (1994).
3. This occurred when they were allowed to keep, for their personal benefit and maintenance, any surplus gold mined over and above the daily quota required of them.
4. Original: "OBra nova de Lingoa g.^{al} de mina, traduzida, aó nosso Igdioma por Antonio da Costa Peixoto, naciognal do Rn.º de Portugal, da Provincia de Entre Douro e Minho, do comcelho de Filgr.^{as}".
5. In 2022, a critical edition of Antonio da Costa Peixoto's two manuscripts (1731, 1741) by Rodrigues-Moura will be published at *Bamberger Editionen* (University of Bamberg Press), which will take into consideration the observations made by Silveira (1944, 1945), Souza (2001), Castro (2002) and Fernandes (2012). This book, published together by Märzhäuser and Rodrigues-Moura, includes contributions in English by Fernando Araujo, Annegret Bollée, Yeda Pessoa de Castro, Alexander Cobbinah, Sandra Furtado, Marcela Farias Bernardo and Cléa Nunes, Christina Märzhäuser and Dzidula Samla, and Enrique Rodrigues-Moura (Märzhäuser and Rodrigues-Moura, 2017, 2019).
6. All examples are given in the original spelling of the Peixoto manuscript (1741) with page number according to the original. The English translations are our own.
7. Peixoto recommends "tomar parecer com algũ negro, ou negra mina, porq.to tem diferente pernumcia" (1741: 42), i.e. 'to consult with a black Mina man or woman about pronunciation', which shows that he tries to assure the practical utility of his transcriptions for the reader.
8. Portuguese printer Antonio Isidoro da Fonseca opened a press in Rio de Janeiro in 1747 but was forced to close it the same year. In 1750, he officially requested permission to print books in Brazil, but the ban was reaffirmed (Bragança, 2010; Hallewell, 1985: 1–23).

9. This dual interpretation of “novo” as ‘recent, anew’ or ‘ex novo’ is described by Carolina Michäelis de Vasconcelos in her foreword to Ribeiro and Falcão (1923) and also included in the *Dicionário de Regionalismos e Arcaísmos* (Vasconcelos, 1997–2017). The use of the adjective “novo” to qualify a scientific text already had a long tradition, being present in over a hundred scientific books published from the late sixteenth until at least the middle seventeenth century, as Rossi (1997: 60) recalls.
10. “me comprem outros volumes, que com ansia e fervor, fico dando ao prello, e brevem.^{te} sahirão” (‘buy other volumes from me, which with eagerness and fervour, I’m handing in to be printed, and which soon will appear’ Peixoto, 1741: 41–41).
11. The 1741 manuscript was eventually published in 1944 by Luís Silveira through the Agência Geral das Colónias, Lisbon. One year later, in 1945, a second edition was required because some of its contents were deemed indecent by the censor (Castro, 2002; Fernandes, 2012; Araujo, 2013). The 1945 edition includes a philological comment by Edmundo Correia Lopes, who already identifies LGM as “Ogunu, Gunu, Gu or alada [...] a variety of the Fon or Daomé, one of the dialects that constitute the Evøe language” (our translation), adding the conclusion that the dialect in question was, in eighteenth-century Brazil, the general language of the Mina people (Lopes, 1945: 45).
12. “naciogal do Rn.^o de Portugal, da Provincia de Entre Douro e Minho, do comcelho de Filgr.^{as} [Felgueiras]” (Peixoto, 1741: 1).
13. A *juíz de vintena* was elected by the parish council (in this case: Câmara Municipal de Vila Rica); he was responsible for 20 *vizinbos* (= heads of households together with all persons depending on them), and worked as judge for questions of small value (100–400 Réis). To fulfil these roles, Peixoto had to count as trustworthy (*homem bom* = ‘a good man’) for local administration because he “incarnated the image of justice for questions of daily life in these territories” (Camarinhas, 2015; Vainfas, 1986). As a general rule, a *homem bom* did not have a mechanical trade or Jewish ancestry, although exceptions to the latter rule are documented.
14. “como não seja capaz de servir o tal officio, por ser homem que toma bebidas e se embebeda de cachaça e anda metido pelas tabernas com as negras e negros” (quoted in Araujo, 2013: 3).
15. Legal documents from Vila Rica mention that Peixoto was able to recognise and talk the African language.
16. In the first half of the eighteenth century, between 82.2% and 94.9% of slaves came directly from Africa. See Rezende (2006: 3) for a detailed demographic description of the enslaved population groups in Vila Rica.
17. In fact, there were several types of “senzalas” in accordance with the composition of its inhabitants. Other names were “choça”, “palhoça”, “mocambo”, “casa dos negros” (Schwarcz and Gomes, 2018).
18. “tantos insultos, ruhinas, estragos, roubos, mortes e [...] cazos atrozes” (Peixoto, 1741: 5).
19. “rogos de am.^{os} e particulares peditorios de p.^{cas} a q.^m não devia faltar, e como vm.^{ce} tambem comigo neste p.^{ar} se empinhou, justo parece que a vm.^{ce} lhe tribute a lemitada oferta de meu trabalho, e obscuro entendim.^{to}” (1741: 3).
20. Peixoto criticises the “preguista” (‘laziness’) and lack of “curuzid.^{es}” (‘curiosity’) of Minas Gerais’ white residents (1741: 6).
21. Though economic reasons prevailed in Pombal’s political project, the idea that an empire had to have a single language had Iberian (Antonio de Nebrija, 1492) and Italian roots (Lorenzo Valla, 1449/1952) (Asensio, 1974; Rodrigues-Moura, 2021). The importance of teaching the Portuguese

language gained fundamental importance with Luís António Verney's *Verdadeiro método de estudar* (1746).

22. See the *Directório, que se deve observar nas povoações dos índios do Pará e Maranhão* (1755), (extended to the whole of Brazil in 1758), which declared indigenous people as free and vassals of the king, and in doing so suppressed their languages, rites, customs and beliefs as incompatible with an enlightened society.
23. “Os habitantes da Capitania não Europeos, e os seus descendentes: negros, que se transportarão de Africa; e mulatos ou pardos, que provêm de Europeo, e de Africana: Cabras, que são os filhos de mulato e negra, ou vice versa: aos negros nascidos no Paiz chamão crioulos: e mestiços em fim, aos que nascem de pai Europeo, e mãe[s] Americana, ou pello contrario” (Azevedo, n.d.: 59).
24. Enslaved African wet-nurses (*amas de leite*) commonly fed the offspring of Europeans (Freyre 1933/ 1998; Schwarcz and Gomes, 2018).
25. See Venâncio (1997) for further discussion of this aspect.
26. All terms appear on pages 11–12. See Castro (2002: 47 ff.) for further discussion.
27. In urban Vila Rica, the underground gold mine, *senzala* and *casa grande* (Freyre 1933/1998) often formed a spatial unit, as can still be observed in Ouro Preto today.
28. According do Bluteau (1713: v. 4, 182): “Escravo forro. Aquele a quem o seu proprio senhor tem dado liberdade” (trasl.: ‘Liberated slave. The one to whom his own master has given freedom’). The act of manumission was considered a concession of the slave owner. Even so, the slaves of Minas Gerais could buy their liberty, against the will of their master, if they found a diamond above 20 carats. At the same time, a slave who denounced the embezzlement of diamonds by his master also gained freedom. Over time, because mining production declined, slaveholders granted manumission more frequently to cut the costs of keeping slaves. See also Schwartz (1974), Mattoso (1982) and Souza (1982).
29. The word “fuão” is the reduced form of “fulano”, “so and so” (‘man’).
30. Castro classifies 25 terms in Peixoto’s glossary as related to ‘confusion, slavery, war and agents’ (‘confusão, escravidão, guerra e mandatários’) (2002: 182–183). For more on the colonial administration, see Salgado (1985).
31. Legal documents analysed in Araujo (2013) refer to the *forras* Thereza Ferreira Souto, the wealthy owner of a *venda* in Casa Branca, and to Rita Dias, owner of a *venda* in S. Bartolomeu, mother of one of Peixoto’s daughters. See Paiva (2009) and Lima (2014) on social behaviour and economic strategies of liberated African women in Minas Gerais.
32. These range among the expressions for which Peixoto doesn’t provide translation: “Não-declaro em portuguez, por serem palavras menos desentes a nossa pulicia” (‘I don’t declare this in Portuguese, because these words are not appropriate for our good behaviour’) (Peixoto, 1741: 35). We therefore base our translations on those presented in Castro: *Anunhatô cri cri = sua coisa ruim, ordinária; anunhatô veo = sua coisa desgraçada, seu desgraçado; anóhíhófou = seu coisa, vá te arreganhar; anunhatô angalito plou plou = sua coisa debochada, prostituta, filho/filha da puta; huhádumi = venham me comer, foder; huhádumi chuchũ = venha me comer, seu cão leproso* (2002: 184).
33. Alongside, marriage between Africans was legal and frequent in Brazil throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as documents show; sadly, African procreation was also exploited by slaveholders to increase their ‘stock’ of slaves, especially regarding mine workers.

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