

**José Machado Pais (ICS-ULisboa)** | *The frontiers of prejudice: prostitution, witchcraft, and the clash with traditional values*

In the early years of this century, the arrival in northern Portugal of large numbers of Brazilian women, involved in the sex industry, set off a protest movement which called itself the "Mothers of Bragança", who were quickly labelled as *beatas* (literally "blessed women", a normally pejorative or ironic term used since the era of 19th century liberalism in Portugal to denote religious and straitlaced women). Their aim was to drive the Brazilian prostitutes ('*putas macumbeiras*') out of town, accusing them of using *Macumba*, a kind of Brazilian Voodoo magic, to bewitch their husbands. The men, boastful of their masculine prowess and charms, squandered their resources in brothels, and the resulting lack of money at home undermined the economic **sustainability** of the family. In so doing, they revived the stigma of *parolo* (oaf, bumpkin, simpleton), the insult directed at Portuguese emigrants in colonial Brazil, for their provincial manners and spendthrift ways.

The Mothers of Bragança movement is here taken as a case study for discussing the sexuality of the Portuguese, in a context of social change. This multidisciplinary research points to conflicts arising out of mismatched temporalities where tradition intersects with modernity. This is what happens when the mothers' sense of outrage, reflecting a newly won freedom, mobilises them into collective action, in a gesture of pro-active **citizenship** not devoid of hangovers from the past, such as consulting witches to break the spell cast by the Brazilian jezebels.

The resulting social confrontation, which intensified the frontiers of prejudice, offers an opportunity to explore social imaginary worlds which generate identities, conflicts and points of cohesion. Traditional rites, promoting social inclusion and exclusion, provide an analytical path for discussing the issue of order and what disrupts it. Deciphering processes which reify the stereotypes of *puta macumbeira*, *beata* and *parolo* becomes a methodological imperative for showing that imagined identities, which threaten social **inclusion**, are neither natural nor inevitable. Lastly, some of the research findings, of a clearly ethnographical nature, point to unexpected implications for public health policies.