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TALES OF LOVE AND DEATH: THE LIVES OF PORTUGUESE WIDOWS

by

PATRICIA TOVAR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1995

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

TALES OF LOVE AND DEATH: THE LIVES OF PORTUGUESE WIDOWS

by

Patricia Tovar

Adviser: Professor Leith Mullings

This ethnographic study documents the ways in which recent socioeconomic, legislative, and demographic transformations in Portugal have affected widows' roles and their position in the family and society since the establishment of democracy in 1974. An examination of the shifts in family structure and household strategies of urban widows in Lisbon allows us to determine the extent to which changes have affected their lives.

The methodological approach includes a combination of participant-observation and structured interviews of fifty-eight widows. A detailed description of their experiences and struggles is presented, giving special attention to their survival strategies, use of resources, and extent of support from kinship and friendship networks. Particular consideration is given to the manner in which they cope with grief and bereavement. The study examines issues of adaptation and identity; many of the widows studied here seek support through

a unique Catholic organization called the Hope and Life Movement (*Movimento Esperança e Vida*, MEV). By comparing widows who do and do not participate in this movement, aspects of gender and kinship theory are evaluated in terms of the extent of female autonomy and empowerment. The study of the changing roles of widows and their organization also permits analysis of the policy and legislative implications of this movement.

Gender and kinship theory, as well as literature concerning grief, bereavement, death and dying form the theoretical backdrop of this study. This allows us to overcome the limitations of previous theoretical models and to understand the role of individuals in effecting change. At the same time, complex aspects of women's place in society will be illuminated by an analysis of the impact of institutions such as the family, law and the church. Concern with institutional change and with women as actors allows comparison with the situation of widowed persons in other parts of the world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the result of a collective and long term effort that would not have been possible without the help of a number of people and organizations. I offer my apologies if I inadvertently have left anyone out who deserved to be mentioned here.

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her family and friends *muito obrigada*.

Tonica Bolobanic, a cleaning woman at CUNY, deserves the honor to be mentioned here for her special consideration during the difficult and lonely period of dissertation writing. We kept each other company late at night when we were the only two people working in the Anthropology Department. Tonica is also a Mediterranean widow who does not remove her black scarf - not even when she is wearing her uniform. I deeply appreciate her small gestures and efforts not to disturb me with the noise of the vacuum cleaner, and her offerings of samples from her garden and kitchen.

Financial support was received initially from the Anthropology Department at CUNY. Thanks to a summer grant from the program it was possible to establish initial contacts in Portugal, to attend a summer language course and complete a reconnaissance trip. From the Instituto Camões, formerly Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa (ICALP), I obtained a scholarship for advanced language training and research in Lisbon. A field grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, a grant from the Abigail Quigley McCarthy Center for Women's Research, and a write-up grant from the Humana Foundation also helped to finance this dissertation.

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My early contacts in Portugal were through the Comissão da Condição Feminina, now called *Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres (CIDM)*. Drs. Aurora Fonseca, Teresa Joaquim, Regina Tavares da Silva and the current president Dr. Ana Vicente offered me a valuable lesson in the history of Portuguese women. Their suggestions and generosity with their time and publications deeply enhanced the quality of this work.

Library research in Portugal is not easy. It takes a great amount of time and energy just to get into a library and figure out the highly restricted schedules and regulations. Libraries and many other institutions close for two hours at midday and are rarely open after 5 p.m. Photocopying is not always available, is expensive and may take weeks. However, I was fortunate to have the help of Portuguese researchers who knew the ins and outs of the system. For this reason I cannot forget the help that I received from the staff of a number of libraries in Lisbon -- CIDM, ICS, ISCTE, Instituto Nacional de

Estatística, INE, Santa Casa de Misericórdia, Direcção Geral da Família and Ministério do Emprego e da Segurança Social -- all of whom rendered major aid. I am also appreciative of the social workers who introduced me to widows in Senior Citizen Centers such as Ana Vilhena da Cunha, and Dr. Mecia from Santa Catarina, and the Santa Casa de Misericórdia for letting me interview people in their facilities, and for access to their free photocopying services.

The *Movimento Esperança e Vida* (MEV) deserves special recognition since they helped me in different forms. I am grateful to them not only for sharing their lives with me, but for their hospitality, their warmth and for the many things, small and big that they did to make my research successful. My deepest gratitude goes to Mrs. Margaret Kendall Villas-Boas who in addition to providing support and cooperation from her position as MEV's president adopted me as her "daughter," and as my "mother" she always tried to make sure that my life was comfortable. Before I began fieldwork we exchanged letters, shared books, information, and ideas by mail, becoming friends before my arrival in Lisbon. I often spent weekends in her home in the suburbs and participated in many of her family celebrations.

Mrs. Villas-Boas installed me in the house of a couple of Portuguese "retornados" from Africa together with their three-month old baby. This family was related to the former MEV secretary and current president Mrs. Maria Judite Ferreira.

Her brother Tozé and his wife Odete treated me and my husband as family members, invited us to weddings and funerals, and asked for advice and opinions on issues such as child rearing, motherhood and work. I lived with them until the end of the first part of my field work.

I frequently participated in MEV's activities, and went into the homes of many widows. MEV members have constantly shown a great deal of excitement about this project, and offered me an exceptional degree of assistance, including paying for some of my travel expenses when we went to out-of-town MEV activities. This is why it would be quite impossible to name here all the members of MEV who contributed to this research in one way or another. But I will mention at least the *senhoras*: Natália Antunes, Maria Emília Sabrosa, Maria Otávia Pedro, Maria de Lourdes Germano Pinto, Mariazinha Leitão, Margarida Ventura, Maria Julieta Magalhães, Maria Emília Viana, and Dona Zulmira Arroz and her group of friends in Covilhã. To Dona Salette who was not a widow when I met her but became one during my fieldwork, my blessings for her hospitality and friendship. And in general to all the widows who participated in this study, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, my heartfelt thanks.

During the first part of the field work, I took advanced Portuguese lessons and translation courses at the University of Lisbon. These language courses had the additional advantage of increasing my understanding of other aspects of Portuguese

culture and society. During this period, I collected short stories and other literary works about widows as well as proverbs, popular sayings, and works dealing with marriage, gender and death. I am very grateful to my Portuguese teachers who made all this possible, especially Dr. Ana Rabaça who later became my landlady, for her extra hospitality, her moral support, and her jam recipes; and to Guiomar her long time housekeeper and companion.

Having mentioned moral support during the field work, I would have to include here many other people; all the people who also made me feel at home. I will begin with Floralba Mesa Serrano from the Colombian Consulate in Lisbon. She, Patricia Granados and Leonor Rios helped me to keep my homesickness under control. Other people who also contributed greatly were Hector Frias who knew how to lift spirits with his friendship and delicious Mexican dishes. I would particularly like to thank Adriana Coman, Kazuya Shiraisi, Cecilia White, Susana Soler, Lourdes Eced, Gina Steding, Velkjo Prijic and Mavisa Carranza.

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Amor e morte, nada é mais forte
Love and death, nothing is stronger

-- Old Portuguese proverb

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CIDM	<i>Comissão para a Igualdade e os Direitos das Mulheres</i> Commission for Equality and Women's Rights
EEC	European Economic Community
FICAV	International Federation of Associations of Christian Widows
FIAV	International Federation of Widows, Widowers and their Children
ICALP	<i>Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa</i>
ICS	<i>Instituto de Ciências Sociais</i>
INE	<i>Instituto Nacional de Estatística</i>
ISCTE	<i>Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa</i>
MEV	<i>Movimento Esperança e Vida</i>
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PALOPS	Countries with Portuguese as the Official Language

INTRODUCTION

The mortuary chapel of the Capuchos hospital in Lisbon is located in an old building with huge windows overlooking the city. The bright light of the early spring morning filtering through the glass accentuated a small white coffin placed between two larger wooden coffins that held the bodies of two aged men. I had come to attend the funeral of my landlord's grandson who had died of a congenital defect. As I was greeting the baby's family and conveying my condolences, a woman dressed all in black entered the room. Without greeting anyone, she went straight to one of the old men lying in the caskets that framed the child and began to sob, repeating, "Oh my husband, my beloved husband!" while kissing his forehead and caressing his face. With tears running down her cheeks she brushed invisible dust from his shoulders, adjusted his tie and squeezed his hands. She then proceeded to remove her wedding band, put it on his chest, then removed his band and, after contemplating it for a moment put it on her fourth finger. She then put her own ring back on. Finally, she opened her purse, pulled out a crucifix and placed it in his hands. At that moment a young man came forward, put an arm around her shoulders and both began to cry.

As I saw this man's casket being taken away by a group of men, I understood the significance of this woman's apparently

minor ritual. She exchanged a ring, the symbol of her married life, for a cross; indicating not only that she would devote herself to the church but also to ensure that her husband would rest in peace. She will probably continue to wear the two rings until the end of her life as a reminder to herself and to the world that she is still attached to her husband.

This work strives to explain what it means to be a widow in contemporary Lisbon and the cultural limitations constraining widows' lives. It is concerned with how they resist adversity, and their daily life strategies. In the pages that follow, I describe the lives of widows as I witnessed them during nearly two years of fieldwork and as they were told to me by the widows themselves. I examine various aspects of widowhood and the relations among the personal and the social levels. These aspects are evaluated from the perspective of the widows themselves, in the context of their collective participation in a Catholic organization for the bereaved, and in light of the legislative and governmental issues affecting them. An important objective here is to understand urban family organization and the effects of social change through the experiences of widows.

Widows in Portugal are not necessarily "women without men." Many continue to be controlled in various ways by their children, their parents, their brothers, local priests and by society at large. Some know this and complain bitterly, fighting for change. To others it is the normal, "traditional"

way of living. The accommodation and resistance of widows to norms imposed on them is a central concern that is best elucidated through examining the efforts and actions of this group of women.

No study of widowhood in Portugal is complete without paying attention to a national organization of Catholic widows, the Hope and Life Movement, hereafter MEV (*Movimento Esperança e Vida*). In addition to being the largest organization of women, with more than 10,000 members, MEV is a non governmental organization (NGO) recognized by the Portuguese state. The activism of this organization has empowered widows and brought about changing attitudes toward gender roles and mourning customs. This organization plays a very important role in the lives of its affiliates, giving them a voice through which to express themselves and the opportunity to receive peer support from other widows who are in the same situation. In order to understand the significance of strategies in this particular widows' organization, the study compares MEV widows with non-affiliated widows.

The anguish caused by grief and bereavement tends to overshadow the concrete issues that widows must solve immediately after the death of their husbands. They must ensure their own and their children's survival, adopt a new identity and employ a number of coping strategies that are conditioned by socio-economic, cultural and ideological forces. The lives of widows are affected by legal, sexual,

custodial and emotional issues. Their experiences and their ability to survive independently are shaped by a number of factors including age, number of children, social class, religious beliefs, property and state policies. Widowhood both as a social phenomenon and a personal experience has other repercussions, such as the necessity to renegotiate social contracts created by marriage. Throughout this work I explore the characteristics of the Portuguese widows and the manner in which they survive in the face of adversity and a variety of social changes.

The 1991 population census shows that there are over half a million widows in Portugal, a country with less than ten million people. By contrast there are only 116,000 widowers. Although marked age differences at marriage account for this discrepancy, there are other factors which have resulted in disproportionate numbers of widows. Historically they have concentrated in the northern coastal areas. Guichard (1982) has attributed this phenomenon to the high-risk occupation of fishing in which many men are employed in this area. The cities of Lisbon and Porto also have a higher concentration of widows, as a result of the internal migration of mothers to join their children.

Portugal, like many other European countries, has an aging population. Life expectancy for women is 77.6 years, and for men 70.7 years, and 13.1% of the population is over 65 years of age. The leading cause of death among the elderly is

cardio-vascular disease -- seven out of ten die of heart or circulatory problems, followed by cancer. The deaths of 17% are attributed to "senility." Prior to 1974, suicide among the elderly was a significant cause of death.¹

Recent political and socio-demographic transformations have touched the lives of Portuguese widows. The demise of Salazar's regime in April 1974 divided contemporary history into two eras. A socialist government introduced a number of reforms such as pensions for old age and survivors, compulsory education and general health care programs. In 1986 Portugal formally entered the European Economic Community (EEC), and money flowed in for a number of programs and government projects. As a result, Portugal is undergoing rapid social change. Public opinion about the quality of change seems to be divided. Some consider the entrance of Portugal into the EEC as problematic, particularly in the process of privatization of many institutions that were nationalized after 1974, including banks, public transportation, and oil companies. Others seem to think that these changes are needed if Portugal is to compete on a more equal footing with the other EEC countries.

1. Fieldwork in Portugal

I conducted fieldwork in Lisbon from November 1991 to June 1992, and from October 1992 to June 1993. My entrance

¹ INE, Instituto Nacional de Estatística 1992

into the community was relatively easy. Though I had visited Portugal twice I did not have friends who were widows. At the suggestion of a member of the government office in charge of women's affairs, affectionately called the "Comissão,"² I established initial contacts with MEV members after a summer field trip in 1990.

Part of the research methodology included formal interviewing using a lengthy questionnaire (see appendix 2). Although there are many young widows, the majority are older, and interviewing elderly women requires a certain patience. Setting up meetings necessitated developing an understanding of their habits and limitations. Problems of age such as slight deafness or frailty often require adjustments in the manner in which an interview is conducted. Urban elderly women usually follow a similar routine. Typically they spend their mornings at home doing household chores. Unless they have a doctor's appointment or an important errand, they go out in the afternoon and try to return home before nightfall. Some choose to have their lunch at a senior center. Interviews were generally granted in the afternoons. If it was too cold for the interviewee or if it was raining, or if she was not feeling well and needed to go to the doctor or simply because she had forgotten the time or the date of our appointment, I

² *Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres (CIDM)*, translated in English as Commission for Equality and Women's Rights.

had to reschedule.

Being constantly around the elderly sensitized me toward a number of things that I always took for granted. When we went for strolls I became aware of their careful movements, the way they walked and looked for support on walls and handrails, and how firmly they placed their feet on the ground before stepping forward, aware that a fall could mean a broken hip or the beginning of the end. The elderly tend to be concentrated in the older areas of the city. Many live in buildings with no elevator, without a telephone and other modern amenities. They do not venture out easily unless they have an urgent affair. I helped them to sort their different medications by pill colors and sizes, heard them recite litanies of aches and pains, and exchange remedies and advice among themselves. I understood their need for trustworthy people, offering my arm to help them navigate the streets and to use public transportation. I became distressingly aware of the vulnerability of those who did not have anyone to lean on for support.

I developed very intense friendships with the women of MEV as well as with other widows. I cried with them when they talked about the tragedies in their lives or when I attended the funeral services for their loved ones. I rejoiced with them over the birth of grandchildren, at birthday parties and sometimes simply celebrating life. I actively participated in the daily routine of the centers for the elderly, helping to

serve food and clear up tables. At Christmas sales and other fund-raising activities, and in communal prayers, my presence was welcome. I went with them to shows and other cultural activities and when asked, did personal favors such as clipping finger nails, caring for bedridden relatives, accompanying them to doctor's appointments, reading their mail and filling out papers. In addition, I gave them information on widowhood and referral numbers when they asked for help with specific problems.

I spent most of my fieldwork without my husband, a fact that elicited different reactions. Some were surprised to see me constantly with widows and asked if I was a widow myself. What other reason would a young woman have to be with them so constantly? When I said no, they immediately said something like, "may God keep you together for ever" or "how lucky you are," or some other remark meant to conjure up good fortune for me. The widows took on responsibility for protecting and advising me. I had a national network of women, and when I traveled out of town they gave me the most gracious and generous hospitality. Without my husband, I sometimes felt like one of the "widows of the living," so to speak. They said that I was in a position to experience first hand how it really is to live without a husband. Not a day passed without them asking about his health, or if I had any news from him, or expressing their regret that he was alone back in New York City. When they learned that he was coming to visit me, they

felt close enough to tease me with ribald jokes like "Oh, you must be very hungry...", or "I won't call you because you will be very busy (Ho, ho, ho)."

To be around widows all the time and away from my husband was often emotionally trying because I was confronted on a direct level with the possibility of my own widowhood. At some point, I began to have nightmares which became intensely stressful. I knew that every married person has the potential to lose their spouse, but the probability is much higher for women. I found consolation in the fact that widowhood now occurs much less often at an early age. However, during the second part of the fieldwork, I had to create a distance between the emotional aspects of research while continuing to be a compassionate listener. There were times after an interview when I was so completely exhausted and drained that I was unable to do anything. My husband came to visit me twice, and he accompanied me on a pilgrimage to Fátima with the widows. He was so overwhelmed to see more than four thousand widows under the same roof, that in his consternation he said, "Oh my God, all the men who have died." I found myself reconsidering my own religious life and frequently participating in familiar rituals in which I had not taken part since I was a child growing up in South America.

2. Sample and Methodology

The methodology included was participant observation and informal and formal interviews supported by analysis of documents such as census records, and other official publications including MEV's handouts and materials. Fifty-eight widows, formally responded to a questionnaire.³ Twenty seven of these were associated with the Catholic organization of widows, Hope and Life Movement (MEV). The other 31, not affiliated with the movement, were recruited from five senior citizen centers, and by word of mouth. This sample of widows includes women with a variety of backgrounds representing different social classes, age cohorts and experiences. Some were extremely rich, some quite poor. Others were educated, and some were completely illiterate. All were urban, although some were born in rural areas. Some came from the Portuguese ex-colonies, or were returnees from labor migration. These 58 women shared the experience of the death of the spouse, in some cases prematurely. This death changed their very existence, their identity, and their status in many different ways. To acknowledge their new identity some wear severe black mourning clothes, or wear two and sometimes four rings on their right hand.⁴

3 All names used here are pseudonyms constructed from common Portuguese names and surnames in order to protect the identity of the people mentioned.

4 The number of rings they wear reflects the number of years that women have been married. The 25th anniversary is often celebrated with new silver bands, and in the 50th gold is

Table 1 shows specific details about the backgrounds of the widows, including age, age at marriage and the age at which they became widows. Other information include place of birth of both husband and wife, the cause of his death, and the husband's age at death. The second column shows the widow's affiliation. Some widows belong both to MEV and to a senior citizen center, but this column reflects only the place from which they were recruited.

The birthplace of the interviewees represent the major cities and provinces of all the regions in the country including the islands and former African colonies.⁵ Lisbon natives do not seem to have any particular preferences in terms of the place of birth of the person they marry. People who are born in other areas of the country tend to prefer to marry individuals who are born in their own regions. Three women and five men were born in Africa but these numbers do not represent the extent of the African experience for many people who were born in the continent and traveled later as workers or as soldiers.

As it can be inferred from Table 1, this study represents the experiences of older widows. The youngest widow in the sample was 56 years old, and the oldest was 92. The average

used.

5 These regions are: Minho (4), Trás-os-Montes (TrasMts, 4), Douro (2), Beira Alta (BeiraA, 6), Beira Baixa (BeiraB, 2), Beira Litoral (Litoral, 3), Estremadura (Estrema, 2), Ribatejo, Alentejo (5), Algarve (1) and Lisbon (19).

age at the time of the interview was 75 years of age. There may be an over-representation of older widows because many were recruited from senior centers as compared to MEV widows who are slightly younger. The incidence of widowhood has been declining for younger women in Portugal. Although there were a number of widows who were left widowed in their thirties and forties, the majority became widows after their fiftieth birthday. The average age in which women became widows in this study was 57 years. Widowhood continues to be a "woman's problem" and now affects more older women than ever. Younger widows, less than 35 years old, are sometimes called "the widows of the motorcycles" because younger men have a high risk of dying in motorcycle accidents. Men have a higher risk of dying of cardiovascular disease when they are in their sixties. The deaths of men at a younger age are also attributed to a number of "risk behaviors" which include smoking, drinking, and accidents.⁶

⁶ This table only includes information about the second husband for the few women who married twice.

TABLE 1
THE SAMPLE

Name	Age	Association	Age at		Widowhood Lenght	Birthplace		Death Cause	Age	Income
			Marriage	Widow		Wife	Husband			
Irene	82	Sr.Ctr	25	74	08	Minho	Minho	Stroke	DK*	45,000
A.Maria	71	Sr.Ctr	21	61	10	Lisbon	Coimbra	Cancer	66	45,000
Manuela	76	Sr.Ctr	24	60	16	Lisbon	Porto	Cardio	60	-45,000
M.Dores	79	Sr.Ctr	24	59	20	Estrema	Africa	Cardio	60	+150,000
Prazeres	92	Sr.Ctr	21	43	50	Lisbon	TrasMts	Lungs	60	15,000
Luisa	78	Sr.Ctr	22	65	13	Lisbon	Lisbon	Other	63	46,000
Teresa	82	Sr.Ctr	42	58	24	Lisbon	Ribatejo	Cardio	68	15,000
Helena	70	Sr.Ctr	47	67	03	Algarve	Alentejo	Other	68	39,000
Margarida	77	Sr.Ctr	24	62	15	TrasMts	Lisbon	Lungs	62	36,000
Laura	68	Sr.Ctr	26	45	23	Alentejo	Alentejo	Kidney	44	70,000
Eduarda	80	None	36	66	14	BeiraB	Alentejo	Stroke	74	37,000
Amélia	73	Sr.Ctr	DK	63	10	Alentejo	Lisbon	Other	83	45,000
Mafalda	83	Sr.Ctr	25	58	25	Lisbon	Lisbon	Cardio	65	16,000
M. João	77	Sr.Ctr	21	69	08	Minho	Lisbon	Kidney	73	47,000
M. José	72	Sr.Ctr	24	58	15	Estrema	Lisbon	Cancer	59	50,000
Felizbela	74	Sr.Ctr	17	73	01	Coimbra	Coimbra	Cardio	79	80,000
Antonia	81	Sr.Ctr	65	76	05	Lisbon	Lisbon	Fire	77	61,000
Conceição	80	Sr.Ctr	23	55	25	Lisbon	Lisbon	Cardio	DK	40,000
Isabel	76	Sr.Ctr	35	51	25	BeiraA	Minho	Lungs	78	40,000
Fernanda	76	None	21	52	24	BeiraA	BeiraA	Cirrhosis	62	+50,000
Joana	76	Sr.Ctr	27	61	15	TrasMts	Lisbon	Cardio	63	30,000
Mariana	88	Sr.Ctr	DK	50	38	Douro	TrasMts	Cardio	49	45,000
Gabriela	84	Sr.Ctr	17	66	18	Lisbon	Lisbon	Cirrhosis	75	37,000
Fátima	72	Sr.Ctr	17	50	22	TrasMts	Minho	Cirrhosis	60	33,000
Madalena	77	Sr.Ctr	21	54	23	Lisbon	Lisbon	Cancer	64	40,000
M.Saudade	77	Sr.Ctr	20	67	10	Beira	Beira	Stroke	73	45,000
M.Piedade	85	Sr.Ctr	25	80	05	Coimbra	Coimbra	Other	81	45,000
Ana	65	Sr.Ctr	20	54	11	Lisbon	Lisbon	Other	62	+24,000
Emília	79	Sr.Ctr	20	44	35	Alentejo	Alentejo	Cancer	47	25,000
Marcelina	81	Sr.Ctr	17	64	17	Lisbon	TrasMts	Diabetes	79	35,000

Name	Age	Association	Age at		Widowhood Lenght	Birthplace		Death Cause	Age	Income
			Marriage	Widow		Wife	Husband			
Alzira	72	None	15	61	11	BeiraA	BeiraA	MS***	85	+30,000
Beatriz	69	MEV	26	61	08	Lisbon	Lisbon	Cancer	59	+300,000
Odete	80	MEV	50	79	01	Lisbon	Porto	Lungs	79	+15,000
Cristina	82	MEV	25	74	08	Coimbra	Beira	Cardio	69	23,000
Assunção	56	MEV	23	33	23	Africa	Africa	Accident	34	+300,000
Natalia	82	MEV	21	50	31	Trasmts	Ribatejo	Other	61	+40,000?
Ilda	71	MEV	17	54	17	Coimbra	Coimbra	Stroke	60	+16,000?
Lucinda	66	MEV	25	61	05	Lisbon	Africa	Kidney	60	45,000
Zulmira	68	MEV	36	62	06	Beira	Africa	Other	63	+100,000
Catarina	68	MEV	22	56	12	Islands	Minho	Cardio	68	150,000
Adelaide	58	MEV	26	39	19	Minho	Minho	Cancer	44	+300,000
Zita	77	MEV	22	67	10	Alentejo	Alentejo	Stroke	70	40,000
Inocência	66	MEV	31	58	08	Douro	Minho	Cancer	55	39,000
Rosario	79	MEV	28	DK	DK	BeiraA	Minho	Cancer	75	-45,000
Lourdes	69	MEV	22	59	10	Beirab	Beirab	Cardio	68	106,000
Joaquina	73	MEV	23	51	22	Alentejo	Alentejo	Cancer	DK	-45,000
Palmira	82	MEV	20	61	21	Lisbon	Aveiro	Cancer	65	-45,000
Alice	77	MEV	24	76	01	Minho	Lisbon	Cardio	79	15,000
Ana Paula	85	MEV	22	65	20	Galicia**	Lisbon	Cardio	65	45,000
Judite	85	MEV	22	74	11	Lisbon	Ribatejo	Cardio	77	41,000
Aurora	78	MEV	19	52	26	Beira	Beira	Accident	53	25,000
Glória	78	MEV	63	64	01	Beira	Beira	Cancer	DK	+48,000
Inês	72	MEV	21	23	49	Africa	Africa	Cardio	26	+150,000
Regina	75	MEV	20	53	22	Porto	Porto	Stroke	70	+300,000
Idalina	60	MEV	17	50	10	Lisbon	Aveiro	Cardio	61	+100,000
Elvira	59	MEV	20	49	10	Litoral	Lisbon	Other	51	+100,000
Carmo	78	MEV	20	65	13	Africa	Lisbon	Other	70	+300,000
Augusta	81	MEV	27	65	16	Lisbon	Ribatejo	Cardio	80	+35,000

* DK means unknown

** Although she was born in Galicia her family moved to Lisbon when she was three years old and identifies herself as Portuguese.

*** MS means multiple sclerosis

The age of first marriage for women in the sample was 25 years which is slightly higher than the national average before 1974 but typical for the city of Lisbon. Since women became widows at an earlier age and seldom remarried, it is not surprising to find women who had been widowed for many years. Although the average length of widowhood was 15 years, there was one woman who had been without a husband for 50 years.

Although this table does not present information about occupational patterns during and after the marriage, it should be noted that only a minority of widows were formally employed during their lives. The last column gives financial information showing the monthly income reported at the time of the interview. The median income for widows was 71,000 escudos, above the minimum pension. It should be mentioned here that in 1992 the minimum monthly wage was 43,000 escudos or approximately U.S. \$250.

The majority of widows (45) had been engaged in income-earning activities but many worked in their own homes as seamstresses, or were in charge of the family business or worked in the homes of other people as maids and cooks. Only a minority had worked in skilled jobs as teachers or in offices. A small number of widows (13) defined themselves as housewives, and they were middle and upper class women.

The occupations of women and men reflect the sexual

division of labor and the gender ideology of the Salazar regime. There were very few jobs open for women in addition to the traditional ones. Men had more possibilities open in public and military service and in the private sector, but often their salaries were not large enough to support a household. The husband's occupation and his access to social benefits were crucial factors in determining the financial situation of the widow. More detailed information about household economy will be presented in Chapter V.

The fact that many MEV members are also affiliated with senior centers facilitated my entrance to that community and enlistment of additional participants. I conducted interviews with widows recruited from five different senior centers located in very different neighborhoods. I used the snow-ball sample technique to recruit additional widows. Everybody in Lisbon seemed to have an aunt, sister, mother or other relative who was widowed and who was willing to be interviewed. They had opinions about those who had led remarkable lives, or had shown special courage in the face of tragedy, and referred me to them. There were women in the senior centers who simply approached me to ask if they could tell their stories, proudly revealing that their lives were like "novels" and that they had gone through so many things that it was worth recording them. Other ethnographers (Brettell 1982, Cole 1991) have noted that this view of their own lives as literature is a common response for Portuguese

women.

Interviews were conducted in different places, usually a location of the widow's own choice such as her home, community or senior citizen center, or a parish house. In these latter places I was given a room or a little corner near the social workers or the person in charge. All interviews were conducted in Portuguese and most of them were tape recorded. One woman did not want to record anything without asking her daughter, another did not feel comfortable having her voice recorded. Some said that they did not have anything to hide or that their lives were like "open" books. Other widows were very shy, and said that their lives were so ordinary they would not have anything interesting to say. The interviews lasted from two hours to several days, depending on their desire to talk and the things they wanted to share. Not all widows were readily available since many of them take care of grandchildren or infirm relatives or, in the case of MEV members, lead busy lives as volunteers in hospitals, attending the sick or participating in countless church activities.

Interviews were often interrupted for tea. In both the senior centers and during MEV meetings, I was invited to partake in communal meals. When the interviews were conducted in the homes of the widows they also had food offerings, as they said, "without ceremony," but as an honored guest in their homes. In some cases they had done some "research" and already knew my favorite kind of tea or what type of pastries

I fancied more. Tables were set with their best china, and an effort was often made to demonstrate culinary skill. Food always played an important part in our encounters. The widows sometimes competed in having me experiment with their delicacies as I gorged down several types of sweets. Mixed in with my field notes, I found several recipes for some of the exquisite foods that I had enjoyed and praised. I frequently reciprocated with boxes of cookies, chocolates or pastries which are greatly appreciated by the Portuguese.

I was always greeted warmly, a big hug and a kiss on each cheek. I was often seen as a "girl," even though I am in my thirties, and they wanted to know all the details of my life. When I initially established contact they often thought I was of Portuguese descent because of my last name. Others assumed I was Brazilian perhaps because of my skin color and my accent, a fact that perhaps facilitated meeting people and gathering data. I was never seen as Spanish, a curious thing, because my mother tongue is Spanish and I tended to mix words from both languages. The old rivalry between the two countries is reflected in a popular saying: "From Spain neither good winds nor good marriages."⁷ Apparently, I was blown into Portugal by good winds. Neither was I an "Americana" even though I identified myself as a student from New York. When I told them I was Colombian, they said things like "but how do you speak Portuguese so well?", and they insisted that

⁷ *De Espanha nem bom vento, nem bom casamento.*

probably one of my ancestors was from Portugal rather than Spain.

In their minds, I was more a journalist than an anthropologist because I was always taking notes or pictures, and had an ever-present tape recorder. When I explained that what I was doing would result in a book they were delighted that their stories would appear in print. The interviews were unpaid, since most would have considered it an insult to be offered money in exchange for information about their lives. Two asked me if they would obtain any benefit, not exactly meaning money, but perhaps help with service institutions or with problems they had. I clearly explained to them what I was doing and I carried with me extra copies of the booklet, Widowhood (CIDM 1992) , published by the *Comissão*, a very useful publication giving information and telephone numbers where they could turn for help. One woman who had a legal problem called me later to thank me because the booklet had been of great help to her. On another occasion I suggested that a widow who seemed depressed attend MEV's meetings because I thought she would benefit from the membership. We went to the first meeting together and later she called to tell me that meeting was the best thing that happened to her after the death of her husband. There were times when I felt uncomfortable with the position of power afforded by my educational background. Even though in Portuguese culture elderly women have high status and respect, there are clear

class differences. Many addressed me as *Senhora Doutora*, (Mrs. Dr.), not only because the Portuguese are extremely polite and formal in addressing people but because some felt they had to show "respect" because they were illiterate or had little formal education and I was from a university in the United States.

The number of elderly women in the senior centers was striking. Though there are couples who participate together in the center's activities, the majority of people who frequent them are widowed or single women. On any given afternoon there were from two to six men compared with twenty to thirty women. Men usually get together in open public spaces where, even in the winter, groups of over twenty men playing cards, talking or listening to soccer games are a common sight in Lisbon's parks and gardens. There are neighborhood bars patronized by men only. Widowers and other elderly men typically do not go in large numbers to places where they will encounter groups of women. In the senior citizen centers spaces are clearly demarcated by gender and the men usually sit together in one corner away from the women. The traditional public places for women are pastry shops and cafes. Going out for a cup of coffee is an institution in Lisbon and many women dress up for this opportunity to see and be seen by other women, to gossip, and to exchange news. Usually they go in the afternoon, spending anywhere from ten minutes to a couple of hours there.

Widowers were not included in the formal in-depth

interviews. The fact that I never saw widowers or any other men, except for priests, in MEV reunions led me to design the questionnaire specifically for women. I was told that occasionally a few men had enrolled but they usually attended only one or two meetings. It seemed that they did not feel comfortable around so many women. I was told that widowers tended to remarry soon, that some died of broken hearts, and a few committed suicide. On one occasion I approached a widower and as I was explaining what I was doing he openly began to sob. It was such an emotional situation that people immediately came to comfort him. The social worker later told me that he had been very depressed since he lost his wife a year before. The widows on the other hand never behaved in such a way. Many wept and lamented, but none expressed such anguish. Moreover, MEV members have learned coping mechanisms and are accustomed to speaking about death in public. Although there is a tradition of *carpideiras* or women who were "hired" to cry at funerals, and a dramatic ritual grieving known in Portuguese as *pranto*, similar to the rituals described elsewhere in Southern Europe (Seremetakis 1991, Danforth 1982, De Martino 1975), the contemporary mode of expressing emotion is less spectacular.

My understanding of the impact of death for widowers was reflected through the lens of the stories told by dutiful daughters who looked after their elderly fathers, or the ones who were embarrassed because their fathers lived in open

concubinage with their servants; or, through the experience of the widows who married widowers. It is important to keep in mind that the death of the spouse can have a very different impact for men and women. Men do not suffer from the same restrictions imposed by death such as rigid mourning clothes, remarriage prohibitions, and ritual obligations. On the other hand, at least in industrialized societies, women seem to have better coping mechanisms and suffer less from the acute psychological stress that can put the lives of men at risk (see Kaprio et al. 1987).

Although it has been difficult to describe what I have learned from Portuguese widows and how my manner of viewing the world has changed, I find myself hoping that my translation of their voices will illuminate an obscure area of knowledge. The narratives presented illustrate the experiences of a range of urban elderly Portuguese widows, with the exception of gypsy widows. Because it was difficult to enter the gypsy community or to talk with them alone, I did not have the opportunity to formally interview them. Nevertheless, I was able to observe them on the streets, at cemeteries and funerals, in groups composed of women, men and children. On the streets it is impossible to talk to them without being constantly asked for money. It was easier to find them in the cemeteries, where they love to talk about their dead. But unlike other Portuguese, gypsy women are not alone in the cemeteries; gypsy men spend whole afternoons, Sunday after

Sunday, "visiting" with their dead. Funerary rituals, although Catholic, differ in intensity from those of the rest of the society. On the few occasions when I managed to talk to women alone, men always appeared and controlled the conversation while the women became silent.

In general, death rituals are undergoing change, funerary ceremonies are shorter, faster and less visible. Slowly but firmly, women have withdrawn from their participation in death rituals. One reason is that people die more often in hospitals and increasingly their remains are cremated. This seems to facilitate freeing women from the responsibility of permanently caring for the deceased in physical and spiritual ways -- a duty that served as yet another instrument of social control. Another factor that has contributed to their partial release from this obligation is widows' participation in MEV, their resistance to social imposition, and their efforts to accommodate to gender and family values in transformation.

3. Organization of the Study

Although this study explores a number of issues concerning widowhood, its primary concern is an analysis of the redefinition of women as widows. Chapter I provides a description of the setting and a brief sketch of the historical and political background that serves as a framework for comparing the situation of widows before and after the 1974 revolution. The following chapter presents a discussion

of the literature on widowhood, reviewing the major themes found cross-culturally and organizing them into a number of categories based on symbols and penalties centered around remarriage permissiveness or prohibition. In this section, I take a critical perspective on traditional gender and kinship theory, as well as explore new approaches to understanding the consequences and conditions of widowhood. In addition, this chapter evaluates the literature on grief and bereavement, and its significance for understanding the magnitude and meaning of the only bereavement organization in Portugal.

Chapter III deals with an analysis of the living arrangements of widows, examined with the framework of single parent households. Focusing on widows as female household heads does not conflict with the study of widowhood, and indeed some insights can be gained by applying this approach. An attempt will be made to deal with intra-household relations, particularly in cases where widows live in multigenerational arrangements, and the interconnections between the households headed by widows and the rest of society. Attention is given to the relationship between household and family. Survival strategies are examined here insofar as they deal with the manipulation of kinship ties and the creation of cooperation networks among women.

My concern in Chapter IV is to probe the meaning of marriage as it is reflected in the general ideology about women's roles as wives, mothers and daughters. I address the

question of remarriage and "eternal love" ideology as the main obstacle to remarriage. As widows find themselves spending their old age alone, they face new dilemmas which acquire compelling urgency as their frailty and vulnerability increase.

Chapter V deals with issues related to income, and examines the ways in which widows reorganize their household economy and the relationship between their domestic financial situation and the wider socio-economic conditions of the country. A section of this chapter is devoted to evaluating the effects of recent changes in social security and inheritance legislation. The chapter also analyzes the inheritance practices in the families of these widows and how they create emotional conflicts of interest among family members of different generations. The household approach helps to illuminate important issues related to age. While young widows are a minority, their circumstances are somewhat different today. Many widows in the study talk about the deprivation that was suffered in the past by themselves or their own mothers.

Throughout the study, I consider the alternatives for aging widows, and their ideas about the ideal way to spend their last days. I discuss Portuguese solutions to the old age quandary: the available programs and services, and who uses them. The plight of the elderly is placed in the context of the debates around the European Economic Community (EEC, now

called European Union) which reflects concerns about the implications of an aging Europe.

Chapter VI deals with issues of death and mourning. Aspects of the relationship between women and death are revealed in the ritual responsibility that falls upon widows as they become the link between this world and the next world, to ensure that their husbands' memories continue alive and that they rest finally in peace. We will see how cemeteries become fields of sorrow, places where feelings of mourning are publicly displayed, and where widows sometimes spend their life savings.

Chapter VII describes the organization of MEV, placing it in the context of the history of the women's movement in this part of the Iberian peninsula. I explore how MEV members accept and resist the imposition of cultural norms related to widowhood, and their participation in the creation of a social movement. A description of the movement's main activities facilitates our understanding of their efforts to contest rigid traditions while accommodating a situation in which they find meaning and a new identity as widows. This is an experience that is both empowering and contradictory as it reproduces traditional gender and family structures. This chapter is concerned with the emotional aspects of widowhood and the effectiveness of support groups. It specifically develops some of the issues outlined in Chapter II regarding the study of widowhood cross-culturally and the different

coping mechanisms found in several cultures. In the concluding chapter, I try to demonstrate how Portuguese women acquire an identity as widows, act in the world, and move on with their lives.

CHAPTER I

PORTUGAL AND LISBON: PLACES AND NUMBERS

1. Portugal: The History and the Ethnography

Located in the western-most part of the Iberian peninsula and continental Europe, Portugal borders in the north and east with Spain, and in the south and west with the Atlantic ocean. Culturally and geographically it is positioned between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The Islands of the Azores and Madeira are part of the country, as is the territory of Macao, the last remnant of the Portuguese empire in the far East. Macao will remain under a protectorship until the end of the century when it will be returned to China. The other former "overseas provinces" in Africa and Indonesia obtained their independence in the 1970s. During this decade, Portugal suffered major political and social transformations that have touched most levels of society.

In a classic study, Orlando Ribeiro (1986) distinguished three main geographical areas; the Atlantic, the Interior, and the Mediterranean. The north is humid, rainy and cold. The south which roughly corresponds to the Mediterranean, is dry, and hot. These dissimilar climatic conditions have supported different agricultural products, cycles and landscapes as well as human settlements. The areas influenced by the Atlantic

Ocean are characterized by dark green forests of pine and chestnut trees with marked variations in mountain areas. In terms of social structure, the north is typically distinguished as a region of minifundia, partible inheritance, and small independent peasant farms. The small size of the plots in the north and the inability of many agricultural laborers to own land in the south combined with the industrialization of urban areas have stimulated massive migration and depopulation of the Portuguese countryside.

In the south, the interminable plains are cultivated with wheat, sunflowers, olive groves and cork trees which give the impression that they are bleeding when they are harvested. Vast arid lands, that seem inhabited by no one, are barren except for shrubs and small trees. But if travelers stop for a moment and listen, they will hear the music made by the sounds of the bells that shepherders use for their goats and sheeps which are a constant presence in these areas. With closer observation the abundant archeological monuments will materialize as silent evidence of the passing of different human groups, each leaving a deep imprint on the region. The south's main features have been delineated by the Roman, Arabic and medieval legacies of farm cultivation, land tenancy and inheritance which have had a long term impact in the social structure. In more recent historical periods, the crown and the church and other members of the landowning class redistributed property among themselves encouraging the

creation of absentee landlords, and a landless, rural wage earning population most apparent in the Alentejo region. The southern coast has an additional element which has brought major change and a distinct configuration to the area known as the Algarve. The final touch is given by tourism, a flourishing industry, attracting hordes of sun starved northern Europeans many of whom have bought homes for their retirement years.

Many ethnographic studies have followed this geographical distinction and roughly divided up the country in the two contrasting areas.¹ Since the first generation of anthropologists in Portugal (Dias 1953 [1981], Cutileiro 1971), ethnographic studies have mainly favored rural areas, describing often small, self-contained communities. More recent studies have connected the villages with the political structure of the country and the continent, while criticizing the way Portugal has been observed by British and North American anthropologists (Pina Cabral 1991). Some scholars have given attention to the Atlantic region with a perspective on coastal areas, in particular fishing villages (Cole 1991). A common thread in these studies has been the study of the systems of transmission of property and its influence on family organization, important issues that must be kept in

1 Current Portuguese ethnographers debate this division and try to integrate the different regions in a national socio-political context. See Pina Cabral (1991) and Brettell (1986) for clarifications of this discussion.

mind in the context of the study of widowhood and inheritance in Lisbon.

In the analysis of the partible inheritance system in rural Trás os Montes, O'Neill (1985) has emphasized the delay in the division of property, the stress on descendants and vertical transmission of property and the centrality of this process in the social structure. Other interesting characteristics of this system are high illegitimacy rates and celibacy, and the manipulation of resources by the senior generation in order to ensure their care in old age. These features were also found by Brettell (1986) in northwestern Portugal. As in other parts of Southern Europe, unequal distribution of property has been described in the Alentejo region (Cutileiro 1977). However, in southern areas such as the Algarve, the impartible system sustaining sheep coexists with other forms of partible inheritance which seem to replicate those of the north (Bastos 1988, 1993).

In 1977 major changes to the Portuguese Civil Code were introduced in the area of family law (Decreto-Lei No. 496/77). Historically the transmission of property privileged the descendant line over affinal relationships. The 1966 Civil Code, not reformed since 1933, stated that the surviving spouse was fourth in line in the order of legitimate heirs, after descendants, ascendants, and siblings-and-their-descendants (O'Neill 1985). The actual division of the property generally occurred at the death of the surviving

spouse who was customarily allowed to remain in the house, administer the property, and make decisions for their children. The survivor could thus ensure his/her own well-being in old age, and delay the break up of the household. Another interesting characteristic is the strong tendency for mothers to favor daughters in terms of inheritance and household headship, a feature which has been noted before and after the legislative reforms. Pina-Cabral (1984, 1986), and Brettell (1986, 1991) among others, found that often, in northern areas of Portugal, one daughter and her husband lived in the same household with the widowed mother. Bastos (1993) encountered the same situation in the small agricultural area she studied in the south. These and other researchers have described how family life in different areas of the country has been conditioned by the operation of female networks where services and favors are exchanged; such networks have persisted because of women's determination and need.

When described as part of the Mediterranean cultural pattern, Portugal has been considered a country in which there is marked gender asymmetry, but where there are also many exceptions to the chastity codes characteristic of other nearby regions. In his study of a rural society during the Salazar regime, Cutileiro (1971) gave attention to women as wives, as elders, and to their religious roles, emphasizing the prestige and status that they acquire, referring to old

women who have certain knowledge and wisdom as "unordained priestesses." In the case of marriage he discussed the danger that this Portuguese group attributes to the sexuality of women and how "the bride's virginity and the wife's fidelity were the basic moral assumptions on which the family was built" (1971:99). On the other hand, in certain areas of the south people do live together for many years without a formal marriage. Many marry when their children are grown and after they get tired of the priest's insistence (Bastos 1993).

The apparent contradiction between reality and ideals regarding women's roles in Portugal has been a concern since Riegelhaupt's (1967) early work in Estremadura. Women are often described as having important decision-making roles in the family but as still subordinate to the authority of men. On the other hand, Brøgger (1992) adopts the extreme and opposing position, depicting the women of the touristic fishing village of Nazaré as completely dominant in the family and household, but men as "meek and powerless." Pina Cabral (1986) suggests that gender inequality is often normative behavior rather than actual conduct, and Caroline Brettell (1986) has called northwestern Portugal a "matri-centered" society, demonstrating how indications of male dominance such as a high value placed on women's virginity have little relevance in some areas. In her study of population and history in a northwestern parish she emphasized the salience of the female line in inheritance, transmission of names, and

ties of solidarity. This so called matricentrality is an important issue that will come up later in this study. Most researchers acknowledge that both rural and urban society are undergoing a process of change which includes a redefinition of gender categories.

As part of the local widows' movement, widows have been openly contesting the cultural and legal practices that have restricted their lives, many of these based on the idea of marital fidelity. Issues ranging from changes in inheritance law to the strict observance of mourning routines are now the subject of criticism among urban and middle class women. Social changes such as male emigration and new patterns of economic exchange have historically resulted in more flexible roles for women. For instance, male migration has allowed women entry into the otherwise masculine realm of farm labor (Brettell 1991). Married women with absentee husbands have come to be called "the widows of the living" because in many cases they have taken on their husbands' social identities and roles. This is not, however, a new phenomenon, as Portuguese men have been going away in great numbers since the time of the "discoveries" and the launching of the maritime trade empire.

For historical and geographical reasons the Portuguese may be said to have turned their back to Spain and the rest of Europe, and their face to the Atlantic. There is still a great deal of national sentiment centered around the sea, and a

glorious past tied to far away places. This is reflected in many areas from poetry to funerary architecture. The Atlantic still plays an important economic and symbolic role in Portuguese identity. It is at sea where many women still lose their men. At the ports, women still wave goodbye to husbands, sons and lovers who depart in fishing boats or as emigrants hoping to return with fortunes made. Some never return, leaving widows and orphans behind. The poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) depicted this national sentiment about the sea from the viewpoint of women; the other side of the maritime epic, an appalling legacy of pain:

Mar Portuguez

*Ó mar salgado, quanto do teu sal
são lágrimas de Portugal!*

*Por te cruzarmos, quantas mães choraram,
quantos filhos em vão rezaram!*

*Quantas noivas ficaram sem casar
para que fosses nosso, ó
mar!*

Portuguese Sea

Oh salty sea, how much of your salt
is teardrops from Portugal!

Because we crossed you, how many mothers cried,
how many children prayed in vain!

How many brides would never marry
So you could become ours, oh sea!

2. The Estado Novo and Its Aftermath

Migration is now less dramatic in Portugal, especially after the economic and political changes that took place in 1974 when a nearly bloodless coup toppled the remnants of Salazar's authoritarian regime. The 48 years known as the *Estado Novo* (New State), were characterized by repression, censorship, dictatorship, austerity, and a complete lack of attention to women's rights.

Development programs for the rural areas were not part of Salazar's agenda. He cultivated an idyllic peasant utopia at home that symbolically helped in the maintenance of the overseas territories. The social inequalities prevalent in the country were left basically untouched during the regime as economic austerity was felt both in rural and urban areas, forcing working-class people and peasants to develop strategies involving extreme thriftiness in order to survive the harsh times. The lack of development in rural areas and a large unemployed labor force accentuated the contrast with a growing industrialism in the big cities. This provoked enormous waves of migration, first to Lisbon and then to foreign countries creating large Portuguese communities in France, Canada, Venezuela, South Africa and the United States. Women were often left behind. Those who were married usually remained to take care of the land while many single women migrated to Lisbon to work mainly as live-in domestic

employees, helping to account for long-term disparity in the gender ratio in Lisbon.

To fully understand the situation of widows and their households in Portugal one must consider historical, social, cultural, economic and demographic factors that have shaped women's lives in general. The condition of women during the *Estado Novo* has been documented by a number of writers. Noteworthy is the work of Dr. Elina Guimarães, a lawyer who had an unprecedented impact on family legislation.² Under the law women were minors who could not even get passports or travel without the authorization of their husbands until 1961. Before 1959, a woman who married a foreigner risked losing Portuguese citizenship. Divorce was prohibited and, to make matters worse, in 1946 a legal reform proposed that married women could no longer vote, a privilege that educated women had had since 1931. Due to the efforts of a group of women, this project was not approved, and voting rights were extended to those who could pay certain taxes. It is only since 1974 that women have acquired full voting rights. Men who were not illiterate could always vote using their rights as heads of family.³

2 See Guimarães 1991.

3 The voting advantages that "heads of family" had were fully used by Dr. Carolina Beatriz Ângelo, a widow, who decided that she had the right to vote under this definition. She was denied this privilege at first, and only after her 1912 lawsuit, did she become the first Portuguese woman able to vote. Subsequently the law was changed and explicitly included the words "male heads of family."

With the reforms of the Civil Code in 1966 Portuguese women began to acquire some rights, at least before the law. Married and educated women gained the most. Among other things, they could freely choose their profession and determine what to do with their salary. In 1976 a new constitution was approved (revised later in 1989) finally considering women as equal citizens with full rights. Although men and women have different occupations, education, and other opportunities, gaps in income and education have narrowed in the last twenty years.

"25 de Abril sempre" (April 25, forever) is graffiti that still is seen on Lisbon walls. This and many other political slogans continue to decorate the city landscape, standing as visual reminders of the events leading to the "Revolution of the Red Carnations," a few years after Salazar's death. Today, April 25 is a national holiday where people still offer each other carnations on the streets to commemorate the end of the Salazar-Caetano regime. Most elderly people I spoke with agree that things in general are better now in Portugal. Many remember the *Estado Novo* as a sad period in the history of the country because they saw their husbands and sons killed and wounded in a tragic African conflict that was aimed at holding together the wreckage of the empire. Others saw their families destroyed by bitter political disputes. Many more were displaced, and Lisbon was flooded with thousands of refugees arriving every day. The population of Lisbon grew 36% from

1974 to 1981 (Fonseca 1988). The integration of the approximately one million newcomers was apparently accomplished smoothly because many had been born in the metropolis and still had families and close ties in Portugal. Civil servants, administrators and other overseas employees continued to receive their salaries. New jobs were created to accommodate them, and many received funds to establish businesses. Later known as the *retornados*, they organized themselves into a political party. Their influence helped to modernize and reorganize many aspects of the social life and social hierarchies. They were less traditional in terms of attitudes about divorce, remarriage and other family values (Pires et al. 1984).

"April 25" brought social benefits such as pensions for the elderly and widows through which a growing welfare state began to intervene in family relationships. Both changes in the Civil Code and improved social conditions in the form of pensions have allowed widows to enforce more positive strategies to prolong the existence of the household as a social entity. A central concern of this study is the analysis of the ways in which pensions have added an important dimension to the range of choices of widows and affected many critical decisions in their lives. Of great importance is the way in which the different inheritance patterns merge in Lisbon, and the way in which city residents continue to be immersed in the inheritance systems of the countryside.

Furthermore, the study also tries to elucidate how these systems both broaden and narrow the options of widows by examining how they have manipulated the rigid inheritance legislation of the past, and the newly gained social benefits to their advantage. It analyzes how the new laws are enforced, and how they are affecting kinship relationships, remarriage and household composition.

3. Portugal and the EEC

The initial years of adaptation to democracy were not without difficulties. Portugal had finally departed from Africa and entered Europe. It was both the epilogue of the empire, and the end of the *Estado Novo*, a historical period characterized by crises, accommodation and reform. Control of the new government was contested by a number of political parties, from the left and the right. The Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the Social Democrats predominated during the reorganization of the government. The Social Democrats and then a Socialist government have held power with a certain stability and steady economic growth. During the early years of democracy, Portugal nationalized education, health, transportation and banks among other things. The government is defined as semi-presidential, which means, in theory, that the president and the parliament share equal powers. President Mário Soares restored relations with the Marxist governments of Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, and later reaffirmed

Portuguese membership in NATO. In 1985, Portugal signed a treaty formally entering the EEC⁴ as one of the poorest countries in Western Europe. Many Portuguese do not fully understand what that means for their country, except that they can now travel freely throughout Europe, and that the country has received important funds. It is too early to assess the full impact of the entrance of the country in the EEC, but there have already been "improvements" in trade and a stimulus for "modernizing" industry, agriculture and infrastructure. In the 1990s, Prime Minister Cavaco Silva followed national and international pressures to privatize transportation and industry, among other things. This has had the consequence of increasing the number of unemployed and reversing the socialization efforts of the 1970s and 1980s.

Entrance in the EEC has resulted in constant national and international debates affecting women directly such as abortion. In Portugal, with few exceptions, abortion is illegal, punishable with two to eight years of prison. The broader situation of women has been an issue of concern since the early treaties of the EEC. The 1957 treaty of Rome through which the EEC was founded, specified that women as workers could not suffer discrimination and had to receive the same

4 After January of 1994 the EEC changed its name to the European Union.

salary for the same amount of work as men.⁵ In 1993, after the Maastrich summit, eleven countries signed an agreement about certain aspects of social policy. Among the issues related to women were the improvement of childcare services and encouragement to share parental tasks, 14 weeks of paid leave for pregnant women, and a new Code of Good Practice providing for a series of preventive and procedural measures regarding sexual harassment.⁶ There is an Equal Opportunities Unit responsible for long-term policies to promote equal opportunities for women and men. Its main programs concern legislation, integrating women in employment and improving women's status in society. Assessing the situation of women in Portugal, the CIDM determined in 1990 that women are not represented in places of importance in the different political parties nor are they representing their country in any of the EEC institutions. The report recognized, however, that in political terms the gap is beginning to close, especially if one considers that a woman had been elected as prime minister in the 1980s. These developments within the country, and the pressures from the European Community have, as we will see, constituted a favorable climate for the development of the

5 The Commission of the European Communities published a supplement to the publication "Women of Europe" in 1983 and 1985 dedicated to a discussion of the Communitarian Law and how it affects women. I used the Portuguese translation "O Direito Comunitário e as Mulheres." Lisboa 1987.

6 Women of Europe Newsletter No 23, Commission of the European Communities. December 1991- January 1992.

widow's movement. So has the Portuguese women's movement to which we now turn.

4. The Women's Movement in Portugal

The history of the women's movement in Portugal is highlighted by the legacy of a number of outstanding individuals who left their imprint as writers and activists, or through the positions of power in which they were situated. Silva (1983) has affirmed that the feminist movement in Portugal has been moderate, never openly subversive or violent but always giving attention to the quest for rights through legal or educational persuasion. A number of women's associations often affiliated with political parties have had great impact on the contemporary situation of women in the country.

The women's movement is usually traced to the creation of the League of Republican Women⁷ at the beginning of the century. Although it is unclear to what extent they participated in overthrowing the monarchy in 1910, they were nevertheless involved in the writing of the Constitution. The League actively pushed for equal civil rights for men and women, the ability of women to enter the civil service, and the granting of divorce for the first time in Portugal.

7 Liga Republicana das Mulheres

It was a new organization founded in 1914, the National Council of Portuguese Women,⁸ which had the largest and most long-term impact in the struggle for women's rights. In 1917 Ana Castro de Osório founded the Crusade of Portuguese Women⁹ which was, in the words of Elina Guimarães (1991), a "female patriotic organization" designed to give support to Portuguese soldiers and their families. After the war, this organization continued and developed educational strategies. While its members did not seem characterized by a feminist consciousness as we may define it today, there was a clear focus on women's relationship to other important causes.

During World War I, upper class women became nurses, and traveled to France in the company of Portuguese soldiers. During the 1920s, women had begun to be involved in consciousness-raising around a number of issues but these efforts were thwarted by the establishment of the *Estado Novo*. Salazar had a clear agenda concerning women's status, placing them back in their homes while reversing the social advances that had taken place in the early decades of the century.

In the 1930s, there were already a number of women's organizations with a common goal: to improve and change the condition of females in the country. Outstanding in this movement were a number of writers, lawyers and other educated individuals. Little by little, Portuguese women began to

8 Conselho Nacional de Mulheres

9 Cruzada das Mulheres Portuguesas

obtain positions in the political life of the nation, with better prospects after World War II. Ultimately, it was only the result of the reforms of the Civil Code in 1966 that permitted women to begin their expansive participation in different aspects of the social, political and economic life of Portugal.

As is the case in many other countries, the women's movement, as well as women's organizations, are characterized by disproportionate representation of elite women. The history of women's political participation, their militancy and activism in the social protests of the 60s and 70s and the ensuing transformation of society is beginning to receive attention by scholars.¹⁰ Women joined grass roots organizations in great numbers during the democratization process. Usually the grass roots activists were members of the urban working class who had already gained some social consciousness as a legacy of their struggles in the labor unions (Almeida Rodrigues 1983). The political participation of women in the formal arenas increased to the extent that they eventually acquired considerable political power in the 1980s.

10 Grass roots organizations and urban social movements have been analyzed focusing on the participation of people in the events of "April 25." Downs (1989) for example, examined protests and community organization around housing issues.

The creation of the CIDM¹¹ was a major step in focusing attention on women's issues. This organization, originally attached to the Prime Minister's Office, was designated as the national mechanism for promoting equality between men and women. More recently, the Comissão became part of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. The main objectives of the *Comissão* are:

"To contribute towards a change in the attitudes of both men and women, so that every person may achieve full human dignity; to promote effective co-responsibility of women and men in all sectors of Portuguese life; and to encourage society to regard maternity and paternity as of fundamental social importance and to accept the responsibilities resulting therefrom" (CIDM 1991:31).

Since its institutionalization in 1977, the *Comissão* has played an active role implementing legislative issues pertaining to women, establishing of Women's Studies in Portugal, and functioning as a research center publishing a substantial number of materials for free or low-cost distribution. In their effort to educate the general public about non-traditional roles for women, they sponsor conferences, seminars and training courses. They air commercials that feature women in well-paid, non-traditional, and highly-trained jobs such as airline pilots or lab

11 In 1993 the *Comissão da Condição Feminina* changed its name to *Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres*, CIDM. People continue to call it "the *Comissão*."

directors, simultaneously offering free legal information and referral services.

The *Comissão* cooperates with both national and international organizations dealing with issues that affect women. At the international level, it collaborates with other women's organizations and represents Portugal at the European Committee for Equality Between Women and Men, and the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, among other activities. It works directly with twenty non-governmental women's organizations represented in its Consultative Council. MEV is one of those NGOs, and the women's organization in the country with the greatest membership. The history of this movement and the reasons for its success have not yet received the attention they deserve. A close look at this organization will be the focus in Chapter VII.

5. Lisbon: The Place and the People

The city of Lisbon offers an excellent context to understand the organization of families and households in Portugal, as well as the role of widowed women in society. Lisbon is the principal port, the capital, and Portugal's largest city. Its early history dates before the Greeks and is lost in legend. One popular myth claims that Ulysses in one of his journeys founded the old Olisipo, the ancient name of the port. Ruins from Roman, Moorish and Christian times dot the

urban hilly landscape, creating a startling contrast with modern buildings. Lisbon has been an urban center for more than 2000 years, but it was not until the 13th century that it became the capital of the Portuguese kingdom under the rule of D. Afonso III. Lisbon acquired worldwide importance in the 16th century when the city became one of the great centers of trade between Europe and the rest of the world. The 17th century was marked by prosperity made possible by the wealth from the colonies. This lasted until the middle 18th century when the city was almost destroyed by a powerful earthquake. Prime Minister Marquis de Pombal used his dictatorial powers to rebuild it. With the exception of some Medieval areas, and the old Alfama district with its narrow, tortuous streets, the whole city was transformed, and in some areas modeled in the grandiosity of other European capitals. Modern Lisbon has a number of squares, broad boulevards, and commercial areas that date from that period. The 19th century brought an imprint of modernity with monuments and elegant avenues. At the turn of the century, the city had many signs of prosperity and growth. Population increased from 160,000 in 1864 to 391,000 in 1890, and the urban landscape was transformed, absorbing this expansion with elegant middle class buildings and neighborhoods (Saraiva 1991). The contemporary architectural shape of the city received new impetus during the Salazar regime under the leadership of the civil engineer Duarte Pacheco. Important contributions from this period are the

bridge over the Tagus river built in 1966, the city's metro system, and new housing for middle class people.

Population growth doubled after the 1940s (Ribeiro 1986), when the city limits were expanded. There were 802,000 inhabitants in 1960. By contrast, the 1988 census shows 2,128,700 inhabitants in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, almost a quarter of the total population of the country. Most industrial areas are located on the southern margin of the Tagus river. The bordering areas of Setúbal and Barreiro are the most important, featuring dense working class populations. What is known in administrative terms as Lisbon's *concelho* (Borough of Lisbon) has 830,500 residents. The *concelho* has been arranged for centuries into geographical units called *freguesias* controlled by appointed local officials integrated into the city administration known as the *Câmara Municipal*. There are 53 *freguesias*, and all of them try to offer services to the community in general and the elderly in particular.

Satellite cities have been constructed in the outskirts of Lisbon since Salazar's times. These have expanded with the arrival of the *retornados*, the thousands of people who returned to Portugal in the 1970s during the decolonization period. There are some shanty towns (*barracas*) where large numbers of African migrants mainly from Cabo Verde and Angola dwell with gypsies and other poor Portuguese, often in miserable conditions. These areas are often surrounded by illegal working-class housing and lack basic services. The

history of the migration of people from rural areas in search of jobs to the growing industrial sector has been reflected in the settlement patterns of the residents of many of the barracas and other inadequate housing settlements encircling Lisbon (Almeida 1985). In general, the city continues to grow in an apparently chaotic way. One often feels that the sidewalks and other public spaces are disappearing under the ever growing number of cars.

Greater Lisbon includes suburban areas some of which are known as "dorms" or bedroom communities. Thousands of people leave their homes early in the morning to work in the center of Lisbon, and return to their homes in the evening. Densely populated areas like Cascais, Oeiras, Loures and Sintra, are linked by rapid trains and buses. Some of them have very expensive housing and luxury hotels, or casinos and beach front properties, as in the case of Cascais and Estoril, where many northern Europeans and other foreigners live.

The ethnic make up of the city is diverse. There has been considerable migration into Lisbon both from rural areas and foreign countries throughout the 20th century. The fact that most immigrants come from the so called PALOPS or Portuguese speaking countries, gives people advantages in terms of integration into schools and the labor force. Moreover, before 1993 immigrants from the PALOPS did not need visas to enter the country. Foreign degrees were automatically accepted and people could practice their professions freely.

In terms of standards of living, the Brazilians, especially those with degrees in health fields like dentistry or medicine and those in the advertisement and media industry seem to be doing better than the other immigrant groups. In some cases it is evident that race relations still follow a colonial pattern of paternalism and subtle racism. Although official statistics were not cited in the latest census reports, and because of years of tolerance towards illegal immigrants, it is difficult to know their exact numbers. Africans tend to be invisible in official reports but visible in construction work. There are many Indians who have come from Goa, Mozambique and several African countries who are situated at both ends of the economic ladder. Those who are at the bottom are very poor, and sometimes live in shanty towns side by side with gypsies. Another minority group is the Chinese from Macao - who can carry Portuguese passports - some of whom are investing in real estate and planning to move their families to Portugal in preparation for the day when Macao is expected to revert to China. The recent influx of immigrants has exacerbated dormant racial tensions that are sporadically manifested in violent incidents.

At first glance Lisbon presents an air of prosperity. Massive construction work and renovations of deteriorated buildings have taken place in preparation for two major events. The city was declared the cultural capital of Europe for the year of 1994, and in 1998 the World Fair Exposition

will take place there. Thanks to funds received from the EEC, the budgets of the city and the Cultural Ministry have increased substantially. Private funds are also being raised to support the previously neglected cultural patrimony. Some of that money has gone directly toward restoration of the city, a much needed effort since Lisbon suffered for years from a lack of attention to its architectural heritage. Major urban rehabilitation programs are well underway. Noteworthy among these are the rebuilding of the historic and elegant Chiado district destroyed by a fire in 1988, the demolition of shanty towns, the expansion of the metro system, and the construction of new highways. All over town, facades are hidden under scaffolding, and the smell of fresh paint is everywhere.

Lisbon has suffered from long-term housing troubles due in part to Salazar's lack of urban planning and policies which froze rents during an extended period of inflation, creating a problem for owners who could not afford skyrocketing cost of repairs while collecting low rents. The city is now subsidizing renovations in historical neighborhoods with the result of a considerable increase in rents. The rent system is undergoing major reforms and in some cases a lease cannot be passed down to other family members as was customarily done. This situation has important implications for elderly women, many of whom live in precarious conditions and have been long-term residents in these areas. Once the current occupant dies

or moves out, the dwellings become available with rents reset to market prices and under new regulations. Many buildings need to be modernized since they lack basic sanitary conditions. For instance it was determined recently that in the old neighborhood of Madragoa with approximately 10,000 inhabitants, 40% of the houses did not have bathroom facilities, and 9% did not have electricity or a sewage system (Diário de Notícias, March 21, 1993).

The different areas of Lisbon present marked contrasts in both socio-economic and demographic terms. In the tourist zone of Bairro Alto where most of the city's nightlife unfolds, there are historical buildings, formerly the residences of the nobility, next to convents often on blocks where prostitution abounds even during daylight hours. Old neighborhoods like this are heavily populated by the elderly, and are undergoing a process of gentrification. Intellectuals, artists and foreigners move in when residences become available. The area is demarcated by fancy restaurants situated next to ancient taverns where locals get together to sing *fados* which are the musical voice of the Portuguese soul.¹²

12 *Fado* means fate but the genre carries with it a broad spectrum of emotions and complex personal and national feelings summed up in a single word, *saudade*. It is popularly said that this word does not have an accurate translation into any other language. In English the words most used to translate *saudade* are longing or yearning, a nostalgia for something or someone, like an ache in one's heart.

Lisbon is described in travel brochures and guides as a "fascinating" and "romantic" city. One guide (Hill 1990:13) informs the reader that the exoticism of the city had a lot to do with widows in black carrying burdens on their heads, a ruined castle, and strange Moorish names. Tourists also consider Lisbon to be a "charming" city because of the contrast between the old and the new, the colors of the city and the mild weather. The characteristics of the Mediterranean climate are felt here in moderate rainy winters and long hot summers. Until very recently, travel books warned visitors about street children and beggars, something that is perhaps more a characteristic of the Salazarist past. Tourists are also impressed by the large numbers of elderly men who frequent public parks and gardens playing cards, talking or simply listening to soccer games on the radio. Sometimes they comprise small groups that can grow to forty or fifty men. Women may be seen hanging their laundry and gathering news from their balconies and window sills. Women's lives are task-oriented, their hands are always busy, as opposed to men's public/leisure time and space. It is in this context that widows live their everyday lives, and in this city that the study unfolds.

6. The Numbers: General Data on Portuguese Population

As mentioned earlier, the population had been steadily and rapidly growing not only in Lisbon but in other areas of

the country at the end of the 19th century, but today Portugal is a country with zero population growth. This demographic change has been mainly the result of international migration and conscious efforts to limit family size due to changes in middle class values. This century has witnessed a major migratory movement which depopulated many areas of the country. Migration has affected not only population density but has brought some prosperity in the form of remittances, increased the salaries of rural workers who were in greater demand, and changed the roles of women who were left behind.

Demographic studies show wide regional variation in terms of population, which roughly contrast with socio-economic inequalities between coast and interior, and north and south (Morais 1986, Guichard 1982). Similarly, age structures vary markedly by region. According to the 1991 census,¹³ the total population of the country was close to 10 million, with the densest concentration on the coast (70%). The districts of Lisbon and Porto have the highest number of residents, in part as a result of internal migration. Currently, the cities of Lisbon and Setúbal are the preferred destination for those who migrate from the countryside because they offer more heavy industry, manufacturing and service jobs.

The 1991 census followed the EEC recommendations which introduced a few important changes. For the first time people

¹³ Instituto Nacional de Estatística. Portugal in Figures, 1993.

living in consensual unions were counted as married, and different family types were taken into consideration including the "monoparental" and multigenerational families. A new category was created to include the "institutional family" consisting of convents, asylums, nursing homes and prisons. Migration estimates are more accurate. In the past, the statistics were calculated based on the number of passports issued, but many people left the country without passports, and after 1986 people did not need this document to move freely in Europe. Migration patterns and state intervention changed. Although there is no precise information, the tendency seems to be seasonal migration for short periods of time. Today it is known that there are more Portuguese in foreign countries than was previously thought (Expresso, February 27, 1993).

Changes in income levels are reflected in housing improvements which in turn are translated to statistics. Most European countries no longer include information about electricity or other services since virtually all dwellings have these amenities. In Portugal, the number of homes without electricity recently diminished by 76%, and those without water and sewage systems by 50%. Living conditions are now more comfortable as demonstrated by a growing number of people who are becoming homeowners due to better incomes and the construction of affordable housing.

7. Aging in Portugal

The fact that the vast majority of the widowed are elderly requires an elaboration of the context of aging in Portugal. During the last twenty years the elderly population has rapidly increased by more than a third. Life expectancy rose from 64 in 1970 to 71 in 1989 for men, and for women from 70 to 78.¹⁴ Demographic studies concluded that three intertwined factors contributed to this accelerated process: return migration, youthful emigration, and a drop in the number of births (Nazareth 1991). For statistical purposes the elderly are defined as people over 65 years of age. As with the idea of childhood, the idea of aging has been a historically specific phenomenon, as are the many attitudes associated with it. People are living longer than ever, and their ability to work is being reconsidered as many countries including Portugal are raising retirement age.¹⁵

In the past, a person who reached the "ripe" old age of 50 would be considered elderly. The age in which people stop being treated as able-bodied is different in rural populations and in less industrialized countries. There are other factors associated with growing old. Some individuals experience age discrimination, and retirement sometimes produces depression

14 Instituto Nacional de Estatística. 1990. Portugal in Figures.

15 A legislative project trying to increase the retirement age for women from 62 to 65 was being debated in Congress at the end of my field work.

and domestic conflict. There are psychological repercussions when people face the idea that their life cycle is coming to an end.

Mortality patterns have changed dramatically. Very few contemporary women expect to die in childbirth, whereas in the past it was a major cause of death for women of childbearing age. Likewise, women had much higher chances of becoming widows early in their marriages. The influence of the welfare state is seen not only in greater economic security but in changing attitudes toward living as an aged person without being dependent on one's children. The "third age" -- some people speak now of the "fourth," a concept used more in industrialized countries -- conjures up dreams of leisure, free time, and travel. This is the ideal way to spend the "Golden Years," but the reality is very different for many.

Compared with other northern European countries, the graying of Portugal may be slightly less marked, but nevertheless aging is seen as worrisome. A fifth of the total European population is over 65 years of age. It has been estimated that between 2010 and 2015 the number of elderly will be higher than the number of young Europeans. Life expectancy for elderly people has risen. For instance, in 1985 an Italian woman of 65 years of age could expect to live 17.7 more years, and a man would live approximately 13.9 years more (Gierveld and Bronsema 1992).

Between 1930 and 1970 mortality and natality heavily declined while migration was at its peak. One of the effects of this demographic transformation has been changing generational relationships and attitudes about aging. Increasingly, the elderly, particularly city residents, are seen as a burden on the young. The presence of elderly both in rural and urban areas tends to be seen as bringing a host of new problems to the younger generations. Old age is more frequently described in negative terms than before the demographic shift. One article published in a Catholic magazine spoke of the millions of Portuguese who will be in the near future "idle, disoriented, depressed, or abandoned" (Cáritas 1992). Obviously some would fit that description but, in fact, those who are now approaching 65 are better educated than ever, have higher pensions, and different ideas on how to spend their money and retirement years contradicting the perception of the aged as burdens. The growing numbers of better educated elders have raised fears about a gerontocracy, suggesting a need to rethink the social contract between generations in order to redesign the articulation of social relations between the different age groups (Nazareth 1991). The preoccupation with social and health services, financial support, and the ability to sustain the aged motivated the EEC to declare 1993 as the "European Year of the Elderly." The European Parliament was in the process of evaluating a legislative project which will consider the rights of the

elderly, with other issues such as income compatible with the cost of living to the right to freely choose a place to live (Expresso, September 22, 1992). The percentage of persons 65 and older climbed from 8% to 11.5% between 1960 and 1980, and to 13.3% in 1990, approximately double what was registered in 1950. If these figures include people 60 and over, the percentage increases to 18.2.¹⁶

In Lisbon 20% of the population is over 60 years of age (Diário de Notícias, May 18, 1993). The elderly predominate in rural areas, particularly in the southern districts (International Federation of Aging 1985). The weight of this demographic change is more noticeable in the Alentejo region as a result of work migration. Young people have steadily left the area in search of jobs in industrialized urban centers. The Alentejo has the lowest birth rate in the country. People over 65 living in rural areas have a different set of problems. They suffer from more isolation and loneliness since they can find themselves alone, with all their living relatives gone to urban centers and foreign lands. When we look at people over 80 years of age (11% of those over 65), we see marked differences. For each man of more than 80 years of age there are two women who are usually widows. The growth of this population is noted with concern when, as in the case of

16 The actual percentage of people with more than 60 years of age in the EEC is 19.7.

Portugal, the population below 14 years of age decreased by 1.4%.

a. Programs for the Elderly

The problems related to widowhood are often compounded as the widow gets older. My own observations suggest that elderly women who do not have supportive family members can find an increased difficulty in developing cooperative networks, particularly if they are isolated at home. The pension system has to some extent contributed to the dissolution of these networks. The elderly rely more and more on the government for their survival and less on their families. The Social Security Administration subsidizes the elderly through a number of support structures like senior citizen centers, home assistance, and homes for the aged. The efforts to provide for this population have resulted in a vigorous expansion of services, particularly those programs in which the elderly continue to live at home and participate in community activities. For instance, since 1980 the number of senior citizen centers sponsored by the government rose from 70 to 636, and home assistance services jumped from 6 to 254 (Ribeiro 1991). Seniors enjoy a number of benefits and discounts from inexpensive monthly transportation passes to reductions of taxes and utilities. These perks are very important for the household economy of widows, especially if we consider that many have to live with a monthly allowance of

less than half the minimum wage.¹⁷ The discount in the public transportation pass means, for instance, the difference between staying secluded in their homes or going out to visit friends and family, and hunting for food and clothing bargains.

Despite these improvements, the most pressing problem noted in the elderly population is lack of access to services and the precariousness of their living conditions. This is particularly salient in the area of housing since many old houses have been totally neglected for years, and some still lack water, electricity and phones. The lives of many elderly Portuguese are associated with poverty and loneliness. Peristá (1992) argues that in the case of Portugal, there was always an over-representation of women in poverty. However, in this instance, the "feminization of poverty" may be a misleading concept that does not consider the fading of women from official statistics as they are blurred into data on the traditional family. Although women have a greater chance of becoming poor, there may not be a great increase in their poverty. What happens, at least in the case of Portugal, is that their poverty is becoming more visible, as is their consciousness about that fact.

On August 4, 1993 a demonstration took place in front of the Government Palace of São Bento in Lisbon. The unusual thing about this protest was that all participants were

¹⁷ Approximately US \$250 a month.

elderly. This act made headlines because Prime Minister Cavaco Silva refused to receive a delegation from the protesters. This was perceived as a lack of interest by the state in the problems of the elderly (Correio da Manhã. April 4, 1993). This day was specifically chosen because it commemorated the "International Day of the Elderly and Solidarity between Generations." Thousands of retirees and other seniors from all over the country demanded a raise in their pensions. The protesters petitioned for actualization of the minimum pension with an increase similar to the current minimum wage.

b. Senior Citizen Centers and Homes for the Aged

Recent transformations in Portuguese society have redefined the relations between generations and have led to an increased isolation of the elderly. The massive participation of women in the labor force, and the lower number of family members in the household has shifted care that was traditionally provided at home to institutional care. Many old people view this change with fear, while others are taking steps to ensure the best care they can arrange while they are still able-bodied. Mass media has taken a stand on this issue, but tend to emphasize the negative aspects. The day after the evening news reported the problematic conditions in one home for the elderly, I went to a senior citizen center and found people terrified and fearful. They could not stop talking about what they saw on television, recounting all the

details. They were especially shocked by a segment in which a nurse appeared to strike a bed-ridden old woman. Following that transmission, a number of newspapers decided to write articles on this issue. For three consecutive Saturdays, the weekly journal "Expresso" (March 6, 13 and 20, 1993) ran inflammatory headlines. One claimed that in the homes for the aged "homicide by omission" was being practiced and another labelled these homes as "houses of death." This last statement is in a certain sense true because when the residents leave they literally do so in a coffin, but their deaths are listed as "natural causes." The houses for the aged are generally seen as places for warehousing and discarding people whom nobody wants.

The *Misericórdia* was the institution that traditionally ran asylums for the elderly, disabled, and bed-ridden poor. In 1907 the Hospital de Todos os Santos housed 17 men and 46 aged women (Ribeiro 1907). The houses for the aged today are a booming and somewhat unregulated industry. The average monthly cost to keep a person is between US \$600 - \$1200.¹⁸ This does not include the "additional" expenses determined by each home. The aforementioned article in the "Expresso" indicated that in Lisbon there are 193 for-profit homes, many operating illegally, and that the Social Security Administration (*Segurança Social*) considered 41 of those as "tolerable" and 97 as "bad." Approximately 5000 people live in those homes and

¹⁸ \$60.000 and \$120.000 escudos.

the waiting lists are long (Expresso, March 13, 1993). The Social Security Administration actually subsidizes many of the users. Many widows see a gloomy future as their traditional support systems break down. Some of the younger ones see the possibility of a home for the elderly as their best option because they are conscious of the heavy burden that caring for elderly relatives entails, the more so as younger people are unwilling to make this sacrifice because of other priorities in their lives. Many elderly, including widows who participated in this study, want a regulated system in which they can spend their last days in peace.

Lisbon is a particularly interesting place to study widowhood. As the capital of a centralized government it is the place where new policy and legislation is developed and usually implemented first. Lisbon has served as a center of migration from rural areas and from the ex-colonies. The city has more women than men, and the number of elderly people is striking. The brief historical background presented here helps us to understand the ideology of the family, and the place of women in both the family and the society. The widow is situated in a context of dramatic socio-economic change. To better evaluate the effects of government policy on women's autonomy and dignity, I have raised a number of issues related to history, politics, and demography as they relate to the status of women in general and of widows in particular. This context is crucial for understanding the transformations in

society and how widows have both accommodated and resisted harsh financial conditions, without pension programs and with an inheritance system that has not always worked to their advantage. My objective in the next chapter will be to present a theoretical background of widowhood. By indicating how various cultures treat widows it will be possible to better understand how culture and society shape the experiences of widows, particularly residence patterns and decisions about remarriage. The discussion of theoretical perspectives and cross-cultural data will lead us into the central concern of this study; the conditions in which Portuguese widows live and cope with widowhood.

CHAPTER II

THE STUDY OF WIDOWHOOD

Widowhood as an area of inquiry has been examined from the point of view of several disciplines with psychological issues related to grief and bereavement, mental health and aging receiving the most attention. Widowhood has been perceived as a neglected area of study as compared to divorce or marriage. It has been suggested that this is a consequence of the negative stereotyping of old women, as well as the fact that many scholars of women's issues are not themselves elderly and therefore may give priority to the study of things that affect them more directly (Blom 1991).

In this study, widowhood is considered to be more a social condition than an emotional state. Nonetheless, in this chapter, I will try to review the different perspectives from which widowhood has been observed and indicate the relevant issues for the study of widowhood in Portugal. I will begin by discussing widowhood as an institution from an anthropological and sociological perspective, proceed to discuss the literature on the experience of Mediterranean widows, closing with a discussion of widowhood from the vantage point of the literature on grief and bereavement.

In anthropology, the study of widowhood was traditionally regarded as an aspect of kinship or mortuary rituals. Social

historians (Goody 1983, Sogner and Dupâquier 1981, Laslett 1979, 1972) have added an interesting dimension by giving attention to demographic questions such as remarriage and fertility and their relationship to inheritance systems. More recently, widowhood has been integrated into the analysis of gender, family and household, but is seldom studied as a subject in itself. By crossing disciplinary boundaries and integrating perspectives that were previously treated as independent I hope to provide a critical analysis of the ways in which widowhood can be understood. As a point of departure I will present a brief review of the cultural aspects of widowhood in different areas of the world, emphasizing the relationship of widows' statuses to different types of societies. This will provide a backdrop to contextualizing widowhood in Portugal.

1. The Institutionalization of Widowhood

a. Cross-cultural Issues

One obstacle in the study of widowhood is that with the exception of a few studies (Perry 1991, Gondar Portasany 1991, Schlegel 1988), widows have been tangential subjects in most anthropological encounters. Often, publications are the result of secondary analyses of ethnographic reports where widowhood was not the focus of study (Potash 1986). Some studies with a sociological focus have attended to aging, counseling issues, and resource networks. Lopata (1987) edited a collection on

the relation between informal and formal support services, as well as emotional and social networks that included cases from the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific. This growing literature includes topics such as the study of filial responsibility in the care of elderly parents, and the differences between expectations and actual behavior in terms of support.

The social consequences of the death of the spouse are very different for men and women and vary a great deal from culture to culture. For most women, the tendency has been towards a significantly different and often restrictive treatment. Moreover, widowhood can bring about devastating social and personal consequences.

I argue that our understanding of the situation of widows will be enhanced if we consider the different configurations in three types of societies. First, we have those societies in which remarriage is forbidden or not accepted through law and custom. Second, there are societies in which remarriage is enforced and levirate is practiced, and third, societies in which there are no special requirements for widows in terms of marital alliances or sexual permissiveness.

The question of remarriage is closely related to inheritance of the private possessions of the deceased, and to property transfers at the time of marriage. In the first type of societies where remarriage is not favored, societies are highly stratified and property is divided according to strict rules, and the wife and the children may be considered as a

certain kind of property, the lives of widows are likely to be more restricted.¹ In these societies widows tend to be seen as "anomalies," or as "dangerous" women who are apparently free from the authority of men and therefore pose a threat to the social order. This cultural anxiety has been expressed in different ways. Hindu widows for example, are subject to a number of austerities including a prohibition to attend family festivals for they would bring back luck on the presents (Narasimhan 1990). Palazzi (1990) has documented how negative views of widows and restrictions on remarriage have historically increased in areas of Europe with changes in the property legislation. The position of widows does not seem to be anomalous in societies where marriage plays a less crucial role in the social organization. Where marriage is not the exclusive domain for sexual relations, the lives of widows are less restricted as in the case of many Polynesian cultures (Buitelaar 1995).

Christian, Jewish, Hindu and other major religious traditions have a variety of controls and regulations restraining the widows' sexuality. Sexual relations are censured for widows, as they are seen in many cases as adultery and as an unfaithful act towards the deceased man. The punishment for this transgression can be very harsh. Perhaps this is related to the threat and the disruption that

¹ See Hirschon (1984) for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between women's status and property.

an illegitimate child will bring into already established inheritance and descent arrangements.

The death customs of many societies require that the spouse of the deceased participate in a number of rituals that will permit the person to reunite society as a member in a new state. After a special period the bereaved person will emerge as free to remarry or will continue in a state of liminality and transition that in many cases becomes permanent (see Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson 1976). These ritual customs can be very different for women and men. This ambiguous state is one of the rationalizations for strict mourning practices where women are isolated, marked, and secluded. Mourning etiquette dictates that widows wear distinctive clothes or colors, cut their hair, or veil their faces. Although other close kin of the deceased are required to follow mourning rules, it is always the widow who has to observe the more severe routines and for the longest time. When a woman in Hausa society becomes a widow,

"she does not adorn her body, she does not use perfumed soap... The hair is not plaited and is washed with potash. No makeup is worn. The head is kept covered with a light *maiya*fi or shawl. The traditional dress of the widow is a strong, old, unadorned wrapper, which is not changed until the end of mourning" (Schildkrout 1986)

Black is the color that has been used for centuries to mark widows in Western Christian countries, Middle Eastern and North African countries. In Europe, strict mourning dress and formalities for widows reached its highest point during the

Victorian Era (Morley 1971). The lives of many European widows have been as colorless as their clothes. In China and India white continues to be used as a marking color for widows while red is the color preferred in some African areas.

Mann (1987) argues that widowhood practices in China, particularly the discourse on chastity, has been manipulated by traditional male philosophers and scholars to make it supportive of the patriarchal structures governing women. The same author also notes that during the Cultural Revolution in China many monuments that were customarily built to honor widows who remained chaste or committed suicide "following a husband in death," were torn down.

The alternatives available for widows are limited, and are even narrower for those who run the risk of becoming burdens to society. This is the case in India where widowhood may be disastrous to a woman (Mencher 1993, Drèze 1990). Hindu widows are inauspicious; religious rhetoric depicts them as especially dangerous and prescribes white saris, shaved heads and meager diets. The suicide of widows has been encouraged and glorified in India and the resurgence of Sati² has raised serious concerns about the consequences of these practices for all women (Stein 1978, Narasimhan 1990). The purpose of this practice was to set an example, an ideal model of behavior.

2 In 1987 in the province of Rajasthan a woman burned to death on the pyre of her husband. This event sparked great controversy in India about the legality of Sati - the burning of widows -, the intervention of the government, and the role of women in Indian society (see Narasimhan 1990).

The suicide of Indian widows has been encouraged and depicted as heroic. It is also assumed that chastity is necessary for the sake of the husband's soul and furthermore prevents the widow from being reborn as a female animal (Stein 1978). Religious beliefs from different traditions oblige women to care for the soul of their deceased husbands, cherishing the idea that they will be reunited in the afterlife, and insuring the social survival of the man beyond the grave.

In the second category of societies, where levirate is practiced, the widow continues to be attached to her husband and subject to male control through a marriage with his brother, or his close male kin. In this case she never leaves the husband's community. Levirate is common in many African and Middle Eastern cultures (Potash 1986, Slater 1986, Katz and Ben-Dor 1987, Kirwen 1979). Islamic and Jewish law have encouraged levirate in the past. By contrast, sororate - in which a widower marries a sister of his deceased wife - is practiced in a very small number of societies in the world. As Potash argues (1986), levirate cannot be conceptualized at the same level as first marriage, nor does it necessarily involve a conjugal relationship. It is often a nominal relationship where the obligations are different from those of the initial couple. If sexual privileges are included in the arrangement, usually they are related to providing the deceased man with an heir. The obligations between levir and widow are variable, sometimes in parallel with marriage, sometimes not. She may

have a choice of continuing to reside in her own household, but if she decides to return to her own kin group she may have to return the bridewealth or other property exchanged at her wedding. Widow's decisions are constrained by her age, number and sex of the children, and if they have acquired rights in their father's estate.

The third category of societies is characterized by groups in which women seem to encounter fewer social and economic penalties as a consequence of the death of their husbands. In these societies access to property is more or less equally shared, and women have autonomy and high status when their husbands were alive (Nelson 1987). For example, studies of hunting and gathering societies in Africa demonstrate that in some cases there is no clear marking of the widow, and no rules restricting a new marriage (Woodburn 1982). Often small-scale societies have mourning rituals and practices similar for all survivors. Wives have an equal chance to demonstrate to the community that they are not profiting from the man's death or a cause of it (Lepowsky 1989). In summary, cultural practices related to widowhood affect women in different ways according to the type of society in which they live. In addition to culturally imposed restrictions there are personal factors that can mitigate or intensify the impact of the death of the husband on the widow and her children.

b. Social Issues Related to Widowhood

The personal consequences of the death of the husband, often become social and even political. The most severe problem seems to be the economic burden, even in industrial countries that are characterized by survivor's benefits (Barrett 1977). Having the father as the only breadwinner has condemned countless women and children to lives of indigence and despair. This economic stress is tied to inheritance systems and other social structures, and related to remarriage.

Scholars have also emphasized the stresses associated with the transition from spouse to widow, as well as the continuing experience of that status, a transition that also implies a reduction of social roles (Kalish 1985, Pitcher and Larson 1989, Lopata 1979). Barrett (1977), pointed out a few years ago that the most consistent and frequently reported problem of widows in the United States is loneliness and isolation. Kitson (1989) examined studies comparing adjustments to widowhood and divorce, concluding that the widowed have very high levels of physical and psychological distress. The sociologist and pioneer of widowhood studies Helena Lopata, concluded in her famous Chicago study (1987) that widows need a number of support systems including economic, service, social and emotional support that must be coordinated by the individual, the community and the nation.

Some studies consider the financial situation of widows to be an additional source of psychological stress (Zick and Smith 1988). Similarly, O'Bryant and Morgan (1989), have demonstrated how widowhood is complicated by lack of experience and knowledge of financial matters. Women have more problems than men, they argue, particularly in those cases where men were in charge of the household finances. They concluded, however, that knowing how to manage money is not necessarily an advantage if there are inadequate resources to meet basic needs.

In order to help the widow and her minor children to survive economically, many countries have developed programs and policies designed to protect them. Some have welfare state legislation, perhaps supplemented by support from charitable organizations, the welfare state predecessor. However, widows' access to pensions and plans depends on their husbands' occupation and social standing. Widows with young children are the ones who fare worst. They tend to do better if they have their own pension and training to survive on their own. In some countries special assistance is given to widows of military or policemen, particularly those whose husbands died in a war or in the line of duty. They are considered to be superior to other widows, deemed worthier, and are seen as deserving exceptional treatment such as better benefits. Pensions may vary according to the military rank of the deceased, with civilian widows at the bottom. There is

sometimes conflict between modern legislation and traditional customs, as in the case of Israel. The status of the widow in this country is determined by a combination of highly progressive laws, and ancient biblical customs incorporating levirate and inheritance rules (Katz and Ben-Dor 1987).

A notable and influential category of widows is that of the former wife of the hero, head of state, or king. These men have royal funerals that become highly politicized events even in bureaucratic states. Their widows become the center of media attention, and their lives are converted into national dramas setting examples and behavior patterns for the whole society. The veiled face of Jackie Kennedy and other famous women presiding at their husbands' funerals are forever engraved in the minds of people all over the world. In many cases widows inherit their husband's public office, prestige, or power, such as Corazón Aquino in the Philippines, or Violeta Chamorro of Nicaragua both of whom became presidents of their countries.

New approaches to the study of widowhood demonstrate that women have not been passive objects transferred by men from group to group (Slater 1986). The more autonomy women enjoy in a given society, the fewer social and economic penalties they will encounter upon being widowed. Although autonomy is a difficult concept to define, and has a variety of meanings, it can be understood as the ability to make decisions on one's own behalf. An autonomy continuum can be described with a low

end in societies in which women are considered to be the property of their husbands or their husbands' families to a high end with those societies in which women make the major decisions about their own lives while their husbands are alive, and expect to continue to do so after their death.

Widowhood can give advantages such as autonomy and independence to certain women, but these benefits are not automatically acquired. In some matrilineal and matrilocal societies such as the Navajo of North America, widows traditionally incurred few economic or social penalties as a consequence of the death of the husband. Nevertheless, those who had adult male relatives often found themselves under the authority of men, relinquishing their own or their children's property to them (Slater 1986). It appears that in many cultures a major obstacle to widow remarriage is the interference of the offspring. For example, many Chinese continue to feel that the remarriage of widows is wrong. One of the reforms of the famous "Marriage Law" of 1950 in China was setting penalties for interfering in the remarriage of widows (Parish and Whyte 1978).

c. Widowhood in Europe

Widowhood in Europe has been studied primarily from literary, historical and demographic perspectives. Scholars have taken advantage of the availability of documents such as wills and parish registers to trace remarriage, fertility

levels and inheritance. For example, Todd (1994), Bolton (1990) and Diefendorf (1982) have examined the conditions that propitiated widow remarriage in London and Paris respectively. Poverty has been considered as a major incentive to the remarriage of widows by Boulton (1990) and Ségalen (1981), and to celibacy by Hufton (1984). Bideau (1980) and Sogner and Dupâquier (1981) analyzed length of widowhood and suggested that widows tended to remarry faster when they had no grown children and needed help with a shop or with farm work. The ratio of women to men has been considered as another reason for remarriage by a number of scholars (Blom 1991), and the female agency in remarriage decisions (Todd 1994). Goody (1983) has also documented the hostility of the church to widow remarriage in western Europe. Similarly, Bremmer (1995) documents the changing views of widows by the church in England as well as the association of widows with witchcraft. Other examples of historical studies are that of Equip Broida (1983) and Perez de Tudela (1983) who have investigated the situation of widows in two areas of Spain in the fifteenth century, analyzing changes in the legislation and their effects on the autonomy of widows.

From a different perspective, other studies in Europe have dealt with the role of women in funerary rituals. Some have specifically examined the performance of laments in mortuary ceremonies (Seremetakis 1991, Caraveli 1986, Danforth 1982, Alexiou 1974). Danforth (1982) stressed the role of

religious belief and how it validates the task of keeping the dead connected with the circle of the living. Caraveli (1986) described the manner in which Mediterranean widows are regarded as "metaphorical extensions of death," as evident in their loss of social status. This symbolic testimony is interpreted as an irrefutable social death. Gondar Portasany (1991) examined the ritual crying (*pranto*) of women in Galicia, also exploring the social and psychological consequences of the death of the husband, and concluded that matrilineality in this area of Spain is a strategy to ensure the survival of elderly women. He suggested that the emotional impact of the husband's death was stronger for widows under 45 years of age. A sociological study centered around the condition of Spanish widows which was published in 1986 (Alberdi and Escario) by the Federation of the Spanish Associations of Widows is a good starting point for the assessment of the needs of this community.

The position of widows in the Iberian peninsula is anomalous in several ways. They are females who reverse the norm by assuming male roles. As they are released from the restrictions of young married and single women, they acquire full legal and economic responsibilities, more authority, and often total influence in the household. In the words of Pitt-Rivers, Andalusian widows are "surrogate males," and "once past the age of child bearing become like certain hen birds of the pheasant family who in old age put on the plumage of the

cock" (1977:80). Iberian widows in rural areas have been the victims of allegations of witchcraft perhaps as a result of this role reversal combined with their dependency on the younger generation. Widows are also endowed with another male attribute, they become the targets of gossip centered around their alleged voracious sexual appetites. Foner (1984) seeks the explanation for this in the inequality between old and young in nonindustrial societies. The anxiety and hostility of men who resent being subordinate to elderly, powerful women gives way to fantasies of malignant old women with male attributes.

At the same time, for many poor elderly women, the practice of "witchcraft" may be their only avenue of economic survival. Selling potions, prayers, and incantations can always help to raise cash in case of need. It seems that those who depend on distant relatives or neighbors for support are the ones who fall prey to accusations of evil-doing. Therefore, feelings of guilt may prompt drawing a link between refusing help to an old needy woman and later suffering misfortune. It does not come as a surprise that widows were often victims of the witch craze in the sixteenth century in Europe (Ginzburg 1983).

d. Widowhood in Portugal

As it was mentioned earlier, one out of every three married women in Portugal eventually outlives her spouse,

while for men the probability is one in five. As the age of women increases, the number of widows multiplies. Since Portugal is considered a country with an aging population an assessment of the situation of widows becomes imperative. The very few publications dealing with the subject of widowhood in Portugal are primarily concerned with legal and psychological topics (Gameiro 1988, Comissão da Condição Feminina 1987). Widows are sometimes mentioned in death and inheritance studies (O'Neill 1983, Brandão 1994, Brettell 1991), in research on peasant communities (Pina-Cabral 1986), and in the works on Portuguese migration which examine both the experience of women who were left behind and the women who migrated (Brettell 1986).

In theory, the customary mourning period in Portugal should last for at least two years, but in rural and sometimes in urban areas widows wear black for the rest of their lives. Traditionally, there have been a number of acceptable roles for Portuguese widows varying according to the locale and the social status of the woman (Moitoza 1982). Studies have often described elderly widows as possessing certain powers that married or single women do not have. As in Spain, the phrase "widow of" is included in many business names. One example is the renowned ceramics factory *Viúva Lamego*. When the factory opened in 1849, it was called "Ceramics Factory of António de Costa Lamego." In 1876 when Mister Lamego died, his widow took

control and improved the business, five generations later it is still in the hands of the Lamego family.

Powerful widows are not always seen in a positive light. Espírito Santo (1984) argues that in areas of the north they are seen as dangerous women and suspected of arranging their husband's deaths and possessing witchcraft powers of harm. This interpretation differs from Cutileiro (1971) who suggests that widows have reputations as healers and wise old women, and were therefore expected to behave in a way that differed from others. In the Southern area studied by that anthropologist, old women (usually widows) are associated with death. They filled religious roles which included dressing the dead, visiting the bereaved's household, emptying jars of water, so that the soul would not stay in the house, and reciting prayers different from the ones approved by the Church.

The status of widows as heads of their families, or as independent women living alone is very different from culture to culture. In Portugal a widow is respected, and by virtue of her state has been able to do things that were traditionally reserved for men, like owning a business, making important decisions about property and the education of children. Although widows in Portugal are seen as vulnerable because they do not have the support of a man, they are not viewed in a negative light as are the single mothers who receive public

assistance in the United States³ -- women who are negatively represented, and seen as trapped in a cycle from which there is no escape.

The definition of widowhood is not as simple as it appears. It is usually understood that a widow is a woman whose husband has died. But, in some cases the couple was never legally married, so technically she would not be a widow. On the other hand, some married women who have been abandoned or divorced by their husbands consider themselves to be widows. Many women who have husbands who are away because of migration or other reasons assume the behavior, dress and social condition of a widow and are called "the widows of the living."⁴

In the event of the husband's death, the survivors may divide the property and move in with relatives or friends, or continue to manage the household. If the widow is young she may have the opportunity to remarry, but there is strong social pressure for her not to do so. Although the contemporary Catholic Church permits remarriage it does not encourage it. Many widows interpret the church's teachings to

3 Portuguese single mothers who receive aid from the government are also seen in a different light. They have a lower status but are not necessarily considered immoral.

4 In Italy they are called "white widows."

mean that marriage is eternal, a sacrament not interrupted by death.⁵

In sum, widowhood is a universal human experience that cuts across cultural, national and class lines. However, the consequences of the loss of the spouse are determined by the culture and the state, and by personal conditions such as age and number of children. These characteristics in turn limit or expand the choices available for widows. Customary Portuguese practices related to widowhood are being challenged today by the massive entrance of women into the labor force, movements to improve the status of women, and struggles by widows themselves. Moreover, birth control technologies have liberated many women from the risks of unwanted pregnancies, and attitudes towards remarriage are changing.

2. Death, Mourning and Bereavement

Bereavement is the personal expression of pain and suffering produced by the death of a loved one. Mourning is the public expression of grief, a sign used to set apart those who experience the death of a close person. This distinction is useful to understand two main trends in the bereavement literature. In subsequent pages I will turn to a review of the literature on grief and mourning, exploring how personal expressions of grief become collective when people participate

5 For more information on the development of the Christian view of widowhood in Europe see McNamara (1979), Goody (1983), and J. Bremmer (1995).

in bereavement support groups. Particular attention will be given to both the negative and positive aspects of these groups, as a departure point in the analysis of MEV, the only bereavement group in Portugal.

Cross-cultural studies of death and bereavement have mainly focused on the variation and meaning of funerary rituals and on beliefs in the afterlife (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, Palgi and Abramovitch 1984). Some of the problems encountered in these studies are related to methodological and ethnocentric issues. Anthropologists have taken their own views about death to the field and have considered other cultures from that perspective. Many studies use only the case of the U.S. as a reference for comparison with the rest of the world, primarily non-industrialized societies (Rosenblatt, Welsh and Jackson 1976). This brings to mind Phillippe Ariès contention (1974) that it is not death in general that we study, but the "death of the other... the exotic death."

More recently, there has been a renewed interest in another aspect of the funerary ritual which is related to the anthropological study of pain and other grief reactions. Although not all cultures display grief at funerals, usually there is some display of other feelings such as sorrow, anger, loss of appetite, mental distress, emotional agitation and sadness (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson 1976). Similarly Eisenbruch (1984) notes that there are a number of societies

in which the expressions of bereavement, both private and public, can continue for many years, or conversely, mourning can cease very quickly. But in both cases, there are rituals marking the end of public mourning. Myerhoff (1980) has pointed out that anthropological literature seldom paid attention to the feelings of the people participating in death rituals. More recently, however, there has been a growing interest in the emotional behavior of mourners at burial ceremonies (Wellenkamp 1988, Seremetakis 1991 Lutz 1986, Abu-Lughod 1986, and Rosaldo 1984) as well as to the social construction of emotions and how they function within a general social context. Some anthropologists have explored their own feelings of mourning as a methodological and analytical way to examine the self and the sentiments (Rosaldo 1984, Behar 1991).

a. Death Rituals and Women

The association of women with mourning that exists in many cultures, and the psychological aspects of mourning rituals, are two significant points that must be kept in mind in order to understand the collective efforts of Portuguese women. The relationship between women and death in Portugal is explored in Chapter VI. Later we will see how death rituals become an additional source of social control as well as a culturally defined way to help widows cope with grief.

The connection between women and funerals has been noted by several authors as have the parallels between weddings and death rituals. Bloch and Parry (1982), for example, take Bachofen's notion of the relationship between female sexuality and mortuary rituals and examine the ways in which these various elements -- death, female sexuality, human reproduction, and fertility -- are combined. Their argument is based on the assumption that women are identified with sexuality, and sexuality with death, that victory over death is symbolically achieved through a victory over female sexuality. Weiner (1976) in her studies of Trobriand exchange gives serious attention to the importance of women in rituals associated with death. She points out, however, that the role of women has often been considered inconsequential to a formal analysis of social structure and that is one of the reasons why many questions remain unanswered in the area of death rituals. A study of women and death is not complete without considering Victor Turner's (1967) theory of liminality, the "betwixt and between," based on Van Gennep's analysis of rites of passage. The transitional phase dominates mortuary rituals and symbolism. Widows are often left at the margins of society, and in many cases they never fully reintegrate, remaining for ever in the liminal stage.

b. The Medicalization of Mourning

Current trends in mental health studies give an interdisciplinary emphasis, integrating medicine, psychiatry and ethnography. Increasingly, these studies attend to cross-cultural issues and the importance of ritual and religious orientation (Eisenbruch 1984, Rosik 1989). A number of assumptions have been recognized about mourning and bereavement practices considered "proper" and how these create conflicts and misunderstandings when different cultures come into contact. In the United States, this concern is related to offering mental health services to immigrant communities. Open emotional displays by foreigners are viewed with suspicion, and often not understood. Moitoza (1982) for instance, contended that Portuguese migrants suffered from anxiety and unresolved grief. People encounter problems when they try to grieve in their traditional way amidst a culture that does not understand their practices. The impossibility of following funerary rituals and ceremonies such as visits to the cemetery or tending the graves, sometimes results in guilt and depression.

Eisenbruch (1984) highlighted two other important issues directed to mental health practitioners. One is that "widowhood is not merely a psychological state of mind," there are a number of social rights and obligations that should not be ignored. And second, the creation of support groups and counseling is not always the ideal thing to do because there

is a risk of imposing the cultural beliefs of the majority group.

Scholarship on bereavement concentrated initially on the health consequences of grief. Other studies explored the connections between bereavement and mortality, usually without attention to the social and cultural context (Rogers and Reich 1988). These studies found an increased risk of death for men after six months of bereavement, mainly from heart disease and sometimes suicide (Bowling 1987, Kaprio, et al. 1987).

There are those who see bereavement as a normal human response, and others who see it as a medical condition. The early work of Lindemann (1944) is often cited as an important step in trying to describe the feelings attached to bereavement in medical terms. His definition of grief as "a definite syndrome with psychological and somatic symptomatology" led many psychologists and psychiatrists to search for the symptoms and features of grief. Emphasis on the medicalization of grief, treating it as if it were a disease (Averill and Nunley 1988), has prompted some researchers to advocate chemical treatments (Fredrick 1983). The consequences of this research can be seen in the development of very detailed "psychometric" instruments for the assessment of the psychological impact of bereavement, and the design of extensive lists of symptoms framing the feelings of the bereaved in medical terms (Stroebe & Stroebe 1987).

Other studies attempt to delineate clear boundaries between what is "normal" and "abnormal" bereavement, in terms of the biochemistry of grief, advocating chemical therapies to replace what is now done psychologically or socially (Fredrick 1983). The tendency to sedate bereaved people gives the impression that those with acute feelings are pathological. During the late 1960s, therapies to ameliorate or prevent "pathological grief reactions" were developed, and two main models came into use. In the "depression model" grief is understood as an emotional response whose symptoms can be interpreted in terms of depression. In the "stress model" on the other hand, bereavement is understood as a stressful life event which can have additional health consequences (Stroebe & Stroebe 1987).

The medical perspective has been challenged by those who see bereavement as a normal transition in which the actors involved readjust their lives. One response was the construction of the "grief process," in an attempt to understand and explain how survivors react to the loss of a loved one (Wambach 1985-86). Here bereaved people are perceived as being vulnerable and in need of coping mechanisms because there is a real risk of death from grief or "broken hearts," suicide, poverty or social isolation. It is worth noting that there is considerable literature on widowhood of the so-called "self help" type, detailing personal "coping skills." Some of these "educational" resources still use the

mental health/pathology model. Within this area of support there are recurrent themes such as adaptation to a new role and finding a new identity (Hiltz 1980, Hansson et al 1988).

The other major theme of bereavement literature is the study of support systems and social roles, how they are constructed and reorganized following widowhood. Lopata (1978) documented the failure of community resources in providing supports for women in the process of re-building their lives, and how they subsequently end up seeing themselves as a burden for children and friends. Bereavement groups have filled this vacuum, and people have increasingly come to see participation as a necessary part of the grief process, as part of the mourning ritual. They have learned that at times of crises there are always outside specialists ready to help. Emotional support can be professional intervention or participation in self-help groups.

c. Bereavement Support Groups

Funerary rituals also offer support for the bereaved person because they may contribute to the resolution of the psychological ambivalence of the people involved (Palgi and Abramovitch 1984). Bereavement groups can be secular or religious. Either way they perform rites of incorporation reintegrating the bereaved into the community of the living. This process is part of the therapy techniques of the 1980s. Group intervention entails structured counseling and "grief

work" facilitation, including giving meaning (interpreting the emotions of the participants and putting them into a ritual context) and adding value to the other ritualistic elements present (cemetery visits, writing cards of thanks, and charitable donations in the name of the deceased) which are seen as having positive psychological effects.

In her study on the social implications of secular rituals, Myerhoff (1980) concluded that bereavement groups give people a sense of integration by helping them to adjust to their transitions. Rituals are important for the social and psychological well-being of the people participating. They provide solutions to problems by establishing a view of reality and a corresponding view of self since they "create a subjective psychological state that restructures meaning." They also build social solidarity and help the bereaved to reintegrate into the society.

In another work, Myerhoff (1982) calls attention to the fact that in contemporary Western industrialized societies rituals tend to disappear. In the United States, for example, with the exception of members of religious groups, there are no clear final separation rituals indicating when it is appropriate to stop grieving. Funerals often lack personal significance, ceremonies are conducted by strangers and do not help to celebrate the deceased or mourn the loss. She suggests that this forces people to construct their own private symbols when they go through their life transitions alone or, as a

last resort, to adjust with the help of the psychoanalyst. Secular alternatives are found to take the place and provide the same meaning and social function that religious rituals offer in other cultures.

The work of traditional ritual specialists has been appropriated in secular societies by members of the "helping professions" like mental health counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. The religious aspects of ritual have not completely disappeared, remaining hidden under "scientific" jargon. On the other hand, churches also sponsor workshops and have social workers and psychologists trained to give advise upon request. Most counselors follow the Kubler-Ross model of stages of grief: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist and teacher of theology, conceives death as a "journey," as spiritual and mystical revelation that would allow a "true liberation." Her work has also played an important role in the construction of what is known as "anticipatory grief" or dealing with people's feelings of loss when a death is expected, specifically in cases of terminal illness, as a way to suffer less and move through the process more quickly.

It has been argued that Kubler-Ross' model has gained acceptance because it could be assimilated into the existing symbolic structure of Western popular culture. For example, Klass (1981-82) suggested that Kubler-Ross created another

binary pair when she opposed technology = hospitals/masculine with nurture = home/feminine as the conceptualization of the bad and good ways of dying and grieving.

Support groups have filled a vacuum and serve as a guide to orient people in the accomplishment of their life transitions. Both funeral directors and clergy have been compelled to receive more specialized and "professional" training in counselling the bereaved as a more effective way to interact with them (Hausman 1981). Secular support groups and bereavement counseling provide an alternative, replace, or in some cases have the same function, as religious funerary rituals in traditional societies.

Bereavement counseling as an area of specialization is growing. The services of counselors, social workers, therapists and other members of the "helping professions" are oriented to work with specific groups from pre-school children to widows, and with a range of special categories such as AIDS, murder, suicide, victims of drunk drivers, and perinatal loss. In the case of spousal death the groups generally follow the "widow-to-widow" model established in the 1970s which uses the "peer counseling" technique. Developed originally in Boston by Phyllis Silverman, this model was set up as an experiment by Harvard's Laboratory of Community Psychiatry. Widows were selected from obituaries in the local newspapers, and contacted for their participation in the program. One of the advantages of these groups is that grief is not seen as an

illness from which people "recover," but as a normal reaction to the death of a loved one. Moreover, in the words of Silverman (1986) "informally and spontaneously, people have rediscovered the value of learning from peers who have experienced a similar problem and who have coped successfully."

Although many of these self-help groups are in fact sometimes led by professionals, often there are no fees involved, and there is direct reciprocity. The exchange involves the sense of obligation and responsibility to care for each other. Silverman called them "mutual-help" groups because the help "invariably goes to others as well as to oneself." Life experience is the basis of expertise and the ability to solve a particular problem. She perceived these groups as more than a reaction against professional help, but as a "positive and sometimes superior response to a human need." The groups are placed in the context of social change, and seen as filling a void when established coping mechanisms are no longer adequate, such as in the case of wars or disasters, and the implementation of new technologies.

A number of programs and groups for the bereaved quickly followed in the United States and other countries. Examples are the "Widows' Consultation Center" founded under the auspices of an insurance company, and THEOS (They Help Each Other Spiritually) providing specific services for widows.

THEOS provides a variety of services in addition to meetings with educational and social purposes.

In Europe, widows had accomplished decades of work and organization in a less secular fashion. The International Federation of Widows (FIAV) was born in France under the name *Groupement Spirituel des Veuves* in 1946 after 300 war widows got together and participated in a pilgrimage to Lourdes. They expanded to other European Catholic countries, including Portugal, and the rest of the world.

The Europeans have kept up to date with research in the United States following in part Silverman's model of examining grief and bereavement. In the case of Portugal, Gameiro (1988) has examined the emotional aspects of grieving, stressing the importance of support groups combined with the teachings of the Catholic faith. Alberdi and Escario (1988) emphasized the high satisfaction level that Spanish widows have in terms of finding a new identity, and helping them leave their isolation and solve their problems. Through these groups widows who feel they are under critical scrutiny from relatives and neighbors find support and help in confronting feelings of rejection. However, many widows do not have information or access to these organizations. One deficiency of the literature on bereavement support groups is its Western bias, and the lack of attention to the importance of the extended family as a support group which clearly exists in the social contexts of many cultures.

d. Effectiveness of Support Groups

One of the themes emerging from the literature dealing with the experiences of people in grief support groups is the effectiveness of the programs. Vachon et al. (1980) concluded that the emotional, cognitive and practical support given to individuals diminishes the distress and dysfunction that non-participants continue to show. Similarly, Lund and Caserta (1992) recognized positive aspects, particularly for those who stay in long-term groups and those who are older. Members perceive that they are all going through the same crisis (*communitas*), and learn to recognize their shared feelings. All groups seem to provide benefits for widows by creating opportunities for the release of painful emotions, and for the exchange of practical matters. The notion of empathy, or "the ability to sense or feel the world as another person senses or feels it" is a constant factor mentioned by the survivors who affirm that they feel better talking with someone who went through the same kind of experience because they are the only ones who can truly understand and help them. This is known as a "shared experience." Many self-help groups have another function, a celebratory one, in the form of a place set aside "once a month" to remember the person who died.

But not all researchers readily agree with the suggested efficacy of the bereavement groups regarding mental health variables such as depression, anger, stress and anxiety. Lieberman and Videka-Sherman (1986) argue that there may not

be advantages for all participants, and conclude that the mere passing of time does not always help people to improve their mental health, nor does the improvement in mental health scores appear to be simply the result of attendance.

Other drawbacks in the way many groups are constructed include treating the grief process as a timetable, a succession of stages until a "graduation" is completed. The attachment of a timetable has been criticized as too rigid, and it is suggested that it may conflict with the bereaved's personal feelings (Wambach 1985-86). Counselors try to fit people's emotions into the different grief stages, leaving the impression that bereavement is a negative feeling, and that the bereaved have to "move through or move into the future," "advance," or "recover" as quickly as possible.

In the United States, support groups are also seen as somewhat artificial, and as unconcerned with issues of ethnicity or class, since most of these programs seem targeted for white, middle class women. Although there is considerable information about the organization of bereavement groups, little attention is given to socio-demographic descriptions of the participants, and to other important aspects of the ritual process. More attention is given to the individual's private grief and to the psychological aspects of the process. The groups may not meet the expectations of some people, particularly of widows who would like to see widowers participating, and a more social, rather than therapeutic,

emphasis. Some people find the sessions very depressing, because they do not want to hear about the misery of others (Hiltz 1975). But in general, as Wambach (1985-86) contends, these groups may constitute a very important avenue for publicly expressing grief, perhaps more important than mourning rituals. Despite considerable disagreement as to which should be the best approach for helping people during this transition, the general conclusion seems that most people who participate in bereavement groups feel helped and oriented. They learn what to do in this specific situation, and to recognize and understand their feelings. Despite the apparent proliferation of support groups, Lopata (1979) found a dramatic failure of the helping professions with respect to widows in her study of the Chicago area. It would appear that there are many widows who would benefit significantly from participation.

3. Conclusion

In summary, the literature on grief and bereavement has emphasized the negative personal aspects of suffering and hardship among widows, rarely examining connections with other aspects of the social fabric, and changes in the larger social structures or the possibilities of transformations in how widows and widowhood are viewed. Psychologists and bereavement counselors should give more attention to sociological and anthropological issues. Widowhood must be analyzed in the

context of a variety of issues, with an interdisciplinary emphasis and with a cross-cultural perspective. On the other hand, this will be best achieved if anthropologists and sociologists give more attention to emotion in bereavement. This study tries to combine those perspectives while giving attention to a number of variables such as death rituals, religion, autonomy, social stratification and relations between young and old among other things.

I have dealt in this chapter with two different issues related to widowhood. One is the cultural aspect noted in the form of restrictions imposed on the widow and the other is the emotional aspect. Treating these two aspects independently creates an artificial distinction as if the two were not connected. Gender is the key to the understanding of widowhood and the clarification of this articulation. Unlike widows in the United States, Portuguese women have taken the emotional side of widowhood to transcend the boundaries between the personal and the political. Their participation in a bereavement group has become an avenue of emotional survival and personal betterment, as well as a political platform to vent their grievances and to reform the traditionally restrictive mourning practices. Although they do not subscribe to radical feminist goals, they are sensitive and increasingly gaining consciousness of the unequal place of women in society. In other words, they have transformed their traditional behavior into political protest.

The actual voices of the widows are often missing in many studies of bereavement and widowhood. This work strives to amend this deficiency by describing how Portuguese widows organized themselves creating their own support group, and how it has moved from offering individual and social solidarity into other aspects of social organization such as challenging structures and exerting pressure for change. The next chapter is concerned with the organization of the families of widows and the relationships between members of the household and kin, describing the residence patterns of Portuguese widows and the creation of cooperation networks to ensure survival in old age.

CHAPTER III

GENDER, FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLDS

*Os filhos da minha filha meus netos são,
os filhos da minha nora, serão o não.*

The children of my daughter my grandchildren are. The children of my daughter-in-law, I don't know if they are.¹

This old proverb is a good starting point for understanding how cooperation and solidarity ties are created across generational lines in Portugal. It stresses the transmission of rights in the female line and it draws attention to the tensions between mothers and daughters-in-law. Such female ties and generational alliances continue to have prominence in the survival strategies of widows in particular, and of women in general. Since there is considerable overlap between widowhood and old age, this chapter underscores the relevance of family support and the strategies to diminish old age uncertainty and vulnerability.

The literature on Portuguese families also suggests that not having a father in the home due to migration or death, and the procurement of old age insurance are factors that have a

¹ Another version of this proverb is: *Filho de minha filha toma o pão e senta aqui, filho da minha nora toma pão e vai-te embora.* My daughter's child, have some bread and sit here, my daughter in law's child have some bread and get out of here.

direct impact on the functioning of female networks. This study tends to confirm that assumption with facts that will be seen in detail at the end of this chapter. Female networks in this case are vertical and horizontal; they go from generation to generation and extend out from the household, connecting with neighbors and friends.

In many areas of the world researchers have noted women's activities in creating extra domestic networks. The work of Micaela di Leonardo (1987) shows how crucial women are in the organization and maintenance of ritual celebrations of cross-household kin ties. Unpaid "work" such as the writing of letters, visits, organizing and presiding over holiday and social gatherings must be included in a critical analysis of women's lives, household arrangements and allocation of time. In the case of Portugal, these female networks have been fundamental in ensuring basic survival, a fact that makes women conscious of their role.

To demonstrate these processes this chapter summarizes current trends in the study of European and Portuguese father-absent families while at the same time considers issues of similarities and differences in this type of family. Widowhood has been an implicit and unstated subject area in studies dealing with female headship. Several insights can be gained from an approach that incorporates widowhood in this area of research, particularly if we consider that at least in Portugal as well as in other European countries, female

household heads include a majority of widows. The study of women as heads of household in Europe is a field that has remained little explored compared with the study of other family types. Family historians are already documenting patterns in the formation of families headed by women in the context of other social processes. Palazzi (1990) for example, has explored how Italian legislation during the past two centuries regulated the authority of women within the family. Since women had no right to administer the family patrimony, they could not be the heads of their homes and were often absorbed into other households. With changes in the law were also changes in attitudes toward women who lived alone who were increasingly marginalized. Poor women had a greater chance of becoming single heads when transmission of property was not a concern. Modern legislation continues to have an impact on household structure affecting families differently according to social class.

1. "Monoparental" Households in Europe

The risk of poverty that single parents face has been a concern of the Commission of the European Communities since the 1970s. Several reports have been written assessing the characteristics, composition and needs of these households. In 1985, the European Parliament resolved to use the term "monoparental" when referring to families composed of minor children living with only one parent (Castellanos and

Fernández 1987). The term was meant to incorporate unwed parents, widowed, separated or divorced people with children. The elderly and the childless are usually left out, but women whose husbands are chronically hospitalized, in jail or live apart from the household for job or migration reasons are included in this group.

In a report sponsored by the EEC it was estimated that 10% of families with children had only one parent living at home, and that the conditions of these families differed from country to country. Everywhere, though, women represented between 75 percent to 90 percent of household heads (Roll 1989). In a study of single parent homes in industrialized countries, Kamerman (1986) discussed variation between countries. For instance, in Sweden 24.4% of all families with children are monoparental, whereas in Israel only 4% are, most of them headed by widows. In Sweden, it was reported that 86% of single mothers were in the labor force, and the rest may have been receiving either training or schooling. In all the countries studied by Kamerman there were policies directed at these families, with attempts to answer the needs of the mothers, and European countries had similar preferences for widows, whose entitlements tended to be more generous.

Given the high number of women heading monoparental families, the Commission for Women's Rights of the European Parliament has adopted a number of measures aimed at guaranteeing equal opportunities to all women. The first steps

of this endeavor involve a statistical and comparative study of all countries that will help to define this family form by using common criteria that are not laden with value judgements and avoids such terms as "incomplete families" or "families in transition," or the word "family" at all. It is recognized that in most countries the so-called "experts" still use subjective terms like "celibate parents" or "single parents" to refer to divorced or separated couples.

The number of single-headed families will probably change if a common definition is used. For instance, some countries include all children living at home regardless of age, whereas other countries count only small children, and some include households with no children at all. In the case of Belgium, the statistics include single parents who live as "husbands and wives" without being married. Divorce legislation has also affected these numbers. In Spain divorce became possible after 1981, in Portugal in 1975, and in Ireland it is still impossible to obtain a divorce.

Other factors that need to be considered are the effects of social support for families and children. In Denmark, for instance, households headed by one parent in many cases enjoy better socioeconomic conditions than two parent households where the father is the sole wage earner having to support his wife and children. Denmark, in fact, provides excellent child care and other support programs, and there is a high number of professional women earning top salaries.

Monoparental families in the EEC are not considered by definition "problem" families. There are, however, a number of families in all member countries that may qualify for the title of problem families, who are the focus of different studies and programs.

In northern Europe, the majority of monoparental families (with minors) are headed by divorcees and separated couples. But in countries like Spain and Portugal, the majority of monoparental families have a widow as head. For instance, in Spain, 97.5% of unmarried women do not have children. Overall, widows seem to be in a better socioeconomic situation than divorced or separated women. Because of their status, they have pensions, priority in access to housing and schools and support organizations. Divorced and separated women have an additional disadvantage since they are still seen as transgressors of social norms, and are frequently ostracized and may lose ties with family and friends (Milardo 1987, Gerstel 1987).

In order to understand where Portuguese widows fit in this discussion it is necessary to clarify the main themes in the study of single headed households. The first step is to outline the theoretical problems in the definition and analysis of these households. Other important themes are: demographic issues; the relationship between female headness and poverty; and the societal views about women heads. Discussion of these themes will serve as a preamble to the

analysis of the organization of Portuguese widows' households. Obviously this approach has some limitations, but I believe exploration of these issues helps to provide a foundation for studying the economic and social reality of widows, particularly concerns related to social programs and policy making. As Mullings (1995) has suggested households headed by women have to be considered in the context of global and national policies. The conditions of these households may have striking similarities across cultures, particularly if we consider that many mothers who are raising children confront similar obstacles. As in the case of widowhood, other forms of female headed households are seen as linked to a host of social problems. Furthermore, there is a strong relationship between ideology and public policy, reflected in representations of mothers without husbands and discourses on family values.

The fact that not all widows are heads of households may limit the utility of this framework. The widow's age, household composition and access to governmental programs play important roles influencing how the household is restructured after the husband's death and how the widow will fare. Other factors such as old age provisions in the form of preference for daughters or sons, informal adoption and regulation of family size also come into play here affect the quality of life of the widow.

2. Single Parent Households: Problems of Definition

Worldwide reports "alarmingly" show how the number of families headed by a single parent have increased, and that one characteristic of these families seems to be their poverty. These families have always existed in history in lesser or greater degree. Wars, accidents, poor health, migration, divorce, and unemployment, among other things, have everywhere left countless people, mostly women, as the sole support of their children.

Interest in this type of family is related to the fact that the parent who is usually in charge is the mother, and that the difficulties associated with caring for children are compounded by a number of factors, including less favorable work opportunities for women and traditional family models that view independent females in a negative light. There are several issues that should be raised in order to recognize the bias that permeates and hinders understanding the composition and functioning of these types of families.

Single-headed households became the focus of attention in social science after Oscar Lewis developed the concept of the "culture of poverty." Lewis argued that some of the attributes of this "culture" included traits like "matrifocal" family structure, strong negative feelings of dependence and inferiority, lack of plans for the future and a high incidence of family pathology (Lewis 1966). This concept was readily adopted by many social scientists and determined much

subsequent social policy. It also shaped family research in a number of countries such as on the black family in the United States, the study of shanty towns in Latin America, and other poor areas of the world. Scholarship on single mothers in poverty serves as an example of how social science research is replete with assumptions about what is considered proper or improper family behavior. These and other analyses disregard the role of economic and political structures that provide the milieu for family formation and concentrate instead on the negative aspects of the group. Since there are many different routes to single headship, and this is not clearly a homogeneous group, we should keep in mind the different subgroups in this category and where widows fit in.

One problem noted in this area is the lack of clarity and agreement in definitional categories. The most common term used in the literature on households is "female headed." Other frequently appearing terms like "broken homes," "lone parents," and "mother-child households," also carry negative labels that imply problems and deviance. There is in this terminology the assumption that a household has only one head, male or female, but only one. In Portugal, as in many other areas, census takers and other government officials not only assume one head, but assume the head is father, who is considered the ideal and symbolic authority figure. Given the family ideals espoused during the Salazar regime, women could not easily assume the headship, not even as widows, as this

would place them in a male role. Often they bestowed that role and the related privileges on their eldest sons.

The term "head" is understood to be the person who makes the principal economic contribution, controls household resources and makes the major decisions. The concept of "head" used in census data is misleading and loaded with a number of presumptions regarding power and gender hierarchies; such assumptions obscure reality, in particular the significant contributions of women to the household. The United States Bureau of the Census and the United Nations recommend using the term "householder" which means the person who owns the residence or in whose name it is registered. In contrast to the criteria that defines as "head" the person who makes the most significant formal economic contribution, this approach acknowledges that in many households several individuals can make equal contributions. Husband and wife, for example, can be co-householders.

In trying to avoid the problems created by the term "head," other distinctions like "female-centered" have been used in an attempt to bring clarity to the reality of household organization. The term "female-headed household" suggests the absence of a resident male, whereas "female-centered households" depict women as important in the family control structure even if a man is present (Blumberg 1993). In many female-centered households, women provide the main economic support even though they are not considered to be

heads. Likewise, the person who provides economically for the household is not always the same individual who makes important decisions.

Another necessary clarification is the distinction between the terms "family" and "household" which are often used interchangeably (Bender 1967, Yanagisako 1979, Rapp 1979). Households or domestic groups usually refer to coresidence groups of people, among whom resources are pooled, consumption shared, and certain chores performed in order to ensure material reproduction. Domestic groups are not necessarily coresident (see Stack 1970) and are constantly evolving. At times they have only one member, at other times, they can include servants, or boarders, or be institutions like convents or orphanages. Whether de jure or de facto, they are productive and reproductive consumption units. Households are primarily described in economic terms, as being analytically distinct from the web of social and emotional relations that constitute a family.

In the case of Portugal, households are not necessarily independent units. A widow may be the only member of her household but she is enmeshed in a number of vital relations with other households. Her daughter may be living across the street or next door, and sometimes a wall is torn down to make communication and exchange easier. Geographic distances are not considered to be obstacles in cooperation between households and helping aged parents. Bastos (1993) described

how people who have migrated and settled in Lisbon traveled back to their parents' homes in the South to help them at harvest time and during other periods of need. Likewise, I observed widows traveling from rural areas to visit their children in Lisbon at times of crises, help them with down payments for houses and cars, pay for the education of grandchildren and keep continually busy cementing strong cooperation ties with family members.

Households can be conceived as mediating a variety of behaviors that connect the daily lives of the members with the broader socio-economic and political level of the society (Schmink 1984). Decisions to migrate, to enter or leave the labor force, as well as consumption patterns are mediated by the make up of the unit. In this sense, the household becomes an intermediate level of analysis. One manner in which widows are connected to the wider socio-economic level is through survivors' pensions. Their decisions to remarry, live in consensual unions, or stay alone are directly tied to access to a survivor's pension.

"Families" are those groups of people linked by birth or by affinity in which a set of relations and obligations exists among the members. Household composition may change but blood ties usually last forever. "The family" is a universal experience, but the way families organize themselves residentially, their structure and function among other things, varies with culture. For instance, family members do

not always live under the same roof. Husbands and wives may not live together, and children do not always live with their biological parents. As a group, the family is far more than an economic unit, being articulated around the satisfaction of sexual, protective and emotional needs which do not necessarily require co-residence (see Sanjek 1982).

Hammel and Laslett (1974) have called attention to the difficult task of comparing households "over time and between cultures." They argued that the most frequently employed approach has been inventories by size, age, sex, presence of husband-wife, parent-child, and kinship and affinal relations. Sanjek (1982) proposes a perspective in which households are seen as units immersed in their political economic contexts and delimited as a space in which a number of activities take place contributing to the maintenance of the unit. The study of these household activities and their links with the wider economy provides a better basis for analyzing households. Family activities such as sharing of production, social reproduction, socialization of children and sexual union are closely articulated and affected by the employment and class structure, thus having profound ideological implications. These activities do not necessarily have to occur within the confines of a household, rather, they occur as a result of the interaction of several households, and of institutions such as churches, schools and restaurants among many others.

The problems of internal variation are compounded when it comes to the so called "women-headed households." Many studies include in this category only those families in which the head is a woman who also has young children in the home (see Kamerman 1986). Such studies are usually concerned with estimating how poor these households are, and how much of a problem they represent for society, especially in those countries in which cash transfers and other governmental aid is given to those families. Other scholars use the concept of "survival strategies" as a challenge to the image of poor families as passive "victims," and highlight instead their active and productive role in society (Schmink 1984). Such strategies include the manipulation and exchange of services, goods, and labor, the extraction of needed resources from different "informal" sectors for sustenance and the participation of all members in the process of survival.

Recently, attention has been given to the roles of women as unpaid laborers in negotiating access to resources, and in the manipulation of extra domestic networks. These strategies become especially meaningful when placed in the context of the larger economy. It would be a mistake to assume that only the poor use these "survival strategies," since rich households also depend on the exchange of services and favors though these are not required for minimal survival. Money, for instance, cannot always buy things like admission into an exclusive club or apartment building, or ensure marriage

alliances and jobs. Acquisition of certain status symbols are in many cases crucial for social acceptance and household reproduction.

Social policies directed at women with children have also been shaped by the old traditional concept of charity that has fostered the idea of the "deserving poor" who "deserve" to be helped and the "undeserving poor" who are blamed and penalized. The moral behavior of the widow, and often of her daughters, was the yardstick that determined the kind of help they would receive from benevolent organizations. Widows have been considered more deserving since it was happenstance rather than choice or "moral failings" that gave rise to their situation, as compared to the case of unmarried mothers. Women who were abandoned or divorced by their husbands were to blame, since they must have done something wrong to drive their husbands away. Even in the case of widows, however, a moral judgement was present. They had to be virtuous in order to continue receiving support. Control of the chastity of widows has been a major theme cross-culturally and historically. Underlying these representations are deep-seated gender biases, and assumptions about the "natural" roles that men and women are supposed to play. The idea that nuclear families are the norm and are a universal model is a recurrent theme in industrialized societies. Families who do not fit into this pattern are seen as dysfunctional. Having a father, or a male authoritarian figure, even if he "drinks a

bit too much," has mistresses, and has a terrible relationship with the mother is sometimes seen as better for the children than the mother caring for them alone.

More recently scholars have highlighted the fact that there is a growing number of middle class women who decide to be single parents "by choice." Families are considered problematic because of the declared lack of need for the economic and emotional support of a man in the house. Furthermore, these mothers appear to represent a threat to the established social order as they are not considered morally fit for raising children. Their situation contrasts markedly with the predicament of many single women who have not made this choice, but are widowed, divorced or abandoned by the fathers of their children. Women who are single by choice also differ from that of many women who head households all over the world, who generally lack formal education, are underemployed or survive through the informal economy, have less access to land or other resources and who may not count on the help of kin (Clark 1986, Garcia Castro 1993). In general, when a woman divorces or becomes a widow, she has a greater chance than a man of falling into poverty (Sidel 1987). Women have lower salaries and training than men, and they still occupy subordinate positions in great numbers.

In sum, there are several important points that must be taken into account in the study of the so-called single-headed families. They include: the socio-economic conditions of these

families; the reasons for their existence; the kinds of government programs that are directed at them; the factors affecting the establishment of nuclear households; and the expected roles for men and women. Different biases may affect interpretations of the data -- especially the most frequent ones that equate female head with "problem" and "deviancy," and which fail to recognize that many family forms can and do coexist.

The other major assumption that must be challenged is that female heads of household are defined by similar socio-economic conditions. According to studies in non-industrialized countries, households headed by women seem to be growing faster in middle class groups (Garcia Castro 1993). Likewise, it has been suggested that certain factors such as steady employment or a raise in the minimum wage help parents stay together. Conversely, migration also creates special conditions that can create temporary or permanent situations of single headship. The theory of the "feminization of poverty" does not seem adequate to explain the growing number of poor people in many countries.

In discussing the relationship between household headship and poverty, Brewer (1988) argued that theories centered around the notion of "human deficit," such as lack of education and skills, are inadequate explanations for the poverty of single-headed households. Rather, Brewer suggested that more attention be given to the ways in which people have

been systematically excluded from the economy of the wider society. She also suggested that the economic reality of single parent households has to be carefully examined as it compares with other families who are poor.

Widowhood has been a major cause of household dissolution in Portugal, but if divorce continues to increase for families with young children, eventually divorce will replace widowhood as the main cause. In the past, many widows and their families were left completely indigent; their only hope for survival was to give their children away, move in with other relatives or go to the street. In households with older children, youngsters were prematurely placed in the labor force but the household may have been able to survive. Older widows often continue to be the heads of their households even if there are grown children with their own families, as is commonly the case. It is also customary for many childless and older widows to have boarders or other unrelated people in their homes, a situation in which they are the authority figures, and *donas de casa*, meaning the mistresses of their homes.

3. Family Patterns in Portugal

Although there is a good deal of research in the area of family structures in Portugal (Rowland 1986, Nunes 1986), it is only recently that scholars have begun to study single households and families. One interesting study was conducted by Brettell (1988) who focused on the residence patterns of

women over the life course. She found an unusual number of female-headed households in the parish of Lanheses in the northwest which was the result of centuries of adapting to the absence of men. The proportion of these households was as high as 39% in 1929. The women who headed these households were widows, single mothers with illegitimate children and married women whose husbands had migrated. Other noteworthy studies include those on divorce (Torres 1990 and 1987), single women (Maranhão and Duarte 1991) and the "feminization of poverty" (Peristá 1992). Maranhão and Duarte (1991) examined the situation of "women living alone" (*mulheres sóas*) which included single, widowed, divorced and separated women in Lisbon. One reason why single parent homes were not considered as independent units of study in the past is that the living arrangements of widows, divorcees and separated women were not seen as different from the nuclear or extended family. Single parent homes in Portugal, as elsewhere, do not comprise a homogeneous group. Likewise, the household patterns of widows do not fit clearly into the general literature on single parent homes. Many households headed by widows do not change considerably after the husband's death. In other cases, several widows of different generations end up living together after their children have moved out. Or, for some widows their children never move out of the household, but bring their spouses in, and in some cases the widows sell their property and move into their children's households. Because there are

very strong emotional ties between widows and their daughters, intense conflicts may arise when things do not work out according to expectations.

The 1991² census shows considerable change in family structure in Portugal. Although the number of families grew by 9.5%, the average number of members per family decreased from 3.4 in 1981 to 3.1.³ Monoparental families with a widow as head represent 12.9% of all families. Having children before 20 years of age was considered unusual, and in fact the average age for women at the birth of the first child was 23.6 in 1980 and 24.3 in 1988. The average number of children per woman was 2.2 in 1980, 1.7 in 1985 and 1.5 in 1988. An average age for first marriage for women in 1988 was 23.9 and for men 25.9. The number of unmarried people decreased by 7% in 1992, while the number of marriages increased slightly, which means that eventually the number of widowed persons will also increase. Widows and widowers are tallied together showing that their numbers increased to 12.3%, with the greatest rise taking place in the southern region of Algarve.

Portugal follows the fertility transition pattern of Western Europe. The demographer, Susan Watkins (1987), offers a convenient summary. The declining birthrate which began to be evident at the end of the 19th century involved a

2 Source INE

3 This statistical data is not broken down by regions and represents the national average. It may show some considerable variations when urban and rural areas are compared.

transformation in reproductive patterns that was related to both socioeconomic development and cultural change. Comparing Europe with Third World countries, Watkins concludes that the worldwide population transition has been the result of alterations in "bedroom behavior." In the case of Portugal, despite a very strong Catholic tradition, the use of contraceptive mechanisms has become widespread. Since abortion is illegal, women who cannot travel to other countries employ underground abortion.⁴ As in the rest of Europe, coitus interruptus and abstinence were the most commonly used means of limiting family size until the advent of the pill (Schneider and Schneider 1984).

Demographers have raised the question of why people today want to have even fewer children than before. Although they agree with the explanation that children in Portugal stopped having an economic value and started being an economic burden, they offer other reasons as well. Nazareth (1992), for instance, argues that extremely low fertility has to do with the way society is organized. The fact that both women and men are integrated into the labor force increases the burden of raising a family, and people consider this a disincentive for having children.

4 Portuguese law punishes abortion with two to eight years imprisonment, with the exception of certain cases where the mother's health is at risk by the pregnancy, or the embryo suffers from an incurable disease or malformation and in cases of rape. Family planning consultations and contraceptives are free of charge. See Portugal Status of Women, CIDM, 1991.

Portuguese women have made conscious efforts to regulate family size according to their economic possibilities. Many widows in my sample volunteered information about their reproductive decisions and were not shy about discussing the number of abortions (euphemistically called *desmanchos*⁵) they had had, and other decisions such as giving their children to childless couples because they could not afford to support a large family. These *desmanchos* did not always cause moral dilemmas and were seen as the only way out of a situation of extreme poverty. In some cases, they created anxiety for the husbands who authorized their wives' abortions, as in the case of Maria José who recounts how her husband, lying on his death bed, urged her to call a priest for the second time, for his last confession. Even though he had never been a religious man he always carried an image of the virgin in his wallet. He felt that he had committed a great sin because he authorized his wife to have abortions. As Maria José recounts:

"I am sorry, I know this is a big sin, but I had many *desmanchos*. In his mind he felt he was guilty of a sin, he had the idea that he was an assassin. We were young, and we already had a son, and we didn't want to have more because my mother-in-law used to say that I didn't have time, that I already worked too hard as a seamstress, and that she couldn't have more grandchildren because she couldn't help with their care. Every time I went to see the midwife who attended me with my son, and she told me I was pregnant, she did those things, but it wasn't true, I had a tumor and I didn't have menstrual blood because it went there, and I was so affected by that and had to see my doctor. And he

5 A miscarriage is also called a *desmancho*. Another meaning of *desmanchar* is to remove a stain or spot.

used to say, 'so, you are here again?' He knew already the reason for my visit because I always had an infection, and he said, 'you can't continue like that.' He even told me, 'I'm going to talk to you as a friend, not as a doctor. I am also married and have children. Use...' and he taught me what to do. I was 49 when I entered the oncology hospital, it wasn't cancer, they took out everything and I was left clean."

A quarter of the widows interviewed did not have living children, and some of these had married very late, in their forties and never had any children. The continuous trend in the reduction of family size in the country is a crucial element in terms of need for external support in old age. It seems that the small size of the families of poor widows as well as of employed women in Lisbon is related to higher child mortality in the past in addition to the decisions to limit family size. Many widows in this study had lost newborn babies and young children. Other lost grown sons in the African wars of the 1960s. In explaining why they did not have more children, the widows gave resigned answers such as *não calhou ter mais* or *não deu*, best translated as "it just did not happen." Many also gave medical explanations. For the most part, these widows had accepted their infertility without treatments and resorted to finding children whom they could informally adopt. Girls seemed to be preferred over boys, as they are expected, and do dutifully care for older relatives. After telling me how she was the victim of her son's and daughter-in-law's greediness, Maria José asked me if it was worth it to have a son. "God forgive me, after all the years

of my life that I gave him." She thinks she is being punished for her decision to have abortions instead of another child that could have been a daughter with whom she would have had a better relationship.

Many childless widows and other divorced or never married women with whom I had contact during the fieldwork seem to think that it is not a good idea for a woman to live alone. If they have the space, they rent out rooms, often at today's market prices,⁶ preferably to other females. Male boarders are still considered a source of gossip and ill reputation among neighbors and relatives. Sometimes they have family members who pay a small fee, but they prefer students because they know they will eventually move out. Otherwise they can get into stressful situations, as is the case with Maria dos Prazeres. She is 93 years old and shares her apartment with a couple: "They live their life and I live mine, but they are waiting for the day I die, so they can have the whole place for themselves."

Other members of the household not related by blood are servants and other household employees, some of whom are treated almost as family members. Traditionally, these women were brought into the household as children or teenagers. Often they did not marry or have children, and lived with the

⁶ Poor widows have less chances of having extra rooms to rent, and their houses may be in need of major repairs. While some widows pay rents of U.S. \$10.00 a month, they may charge for a room the equivalent of \$200.00 or more.

family for the rest of their lives. When they became feeble, some were placed in special homes and a few were compensated in other ways and were given houses into which they moved to spend their old age. Most people do not have live-in servants any more. If they need hired help, they get a *mulher a dias*, a female daily employee who comes for a certain number of hours during the day. Often, very special and close relationships develop with these household members, as in Elvira's case:

"I work at home, I have a small embroidery workshop, I have an "adoptive" granddaughter and we have lunch together and I take her to swimming lessons. She is the daughter of this friend of mine who used to be my employee more than eighteen years ago until she got married and left my home."

Close friends are also considered part of the family, particularly if they live in the same neighborhood. It is the result of years of efforts to cement profound friendships among women of the same generation. Irene (age 82), for instance, dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief, recounted how the recent death of her girlfriend affected her more than the death of her husband, who was bedridden by a stroke for many years. She felt very lonely because she thought that at her age it was difficult for her to find another female friend to keep her company. Many widows highlighted the fact that after they lost their husbands, their friends tended to desert them. They also stopped receiving visitors, and took great care not to be seen in male company because "people talk." Many widows who live alone suffered from fear; they were afraid of being

robbed in their homes, and fearful of being sick or dying alone.

It is interesting to note that only in one case did I come across two widowed sisters living together. Gloria was in the process of moving into her sister's home because the house in which she was living since 1955 was going to be demolished. When she had moved into this home with her husband, they had rented a room. Then, when their landlady died she had inherited the lease for the whole apartment. Now, Gloria was being compensated and paid to move out. She never had any children because she was afraid of the economic responsibility, and her husband was a widower and already had three children. The house in which her sister lives belonged originally to both of them, an inheritance from their parents, but Gloria had previously given up her rights since her sister remained at home taking care of their parents.

Only in a small number of cases in my sample did widows live with a sibling who was single and this was not necessarily seen as ideal. Such relationships could be quite unequal with the widow losing her independence if she were not the senior member of the household. The case of Lourdes, who is 69 and never had any children, is one example. She and her husband bought the house in which she lives with her older sister and brother. When she was newly married, her husband was sent to Africa, and she accompanied him. Her brother and sister moved in to take care of the house while they were

overseas. When Lourdes and her husband returned from Africa, they did not move out and the four lived together. Lourdes' husband died in 1985 and soon after her sister insisted that the property should be under the three siblings' name. Lourdes resentfully complained that her sister is a *mãe galinha*, a mother hen who constantly wanted to control her life. She was not allowed to stay out late and could not invite friends to her place. Her only escape was her participation in MEV's activities and visits with her nieces and nephews who lived one block away from her home.

Pina Cabral (1991) has called attention to the close relationships that develop in Porto between siblings and cousins who tend to live nearby. He called this *vicinalidade*, which more or less means neighborliness, and is expressed in strong cooperation and reciprocal ties between siblings and sometimes cousins of the same neighborhood -- as a result of neolocal residence patterns. Brettell (1988) has also explored sibling vicinality demonstrating a number of intrafamily cooperation patterns manipulated by women. She gives a historical perspective and connects these family relations to the life course and with other strategies such as godparenthood. This study confirms that the same situation exists for widows in Lisbon, most of whom had a sibling, ideally a sister, a cousin or a goddaughter living close by or in neighborhoods easily accessible by public transportation, and with whom they maintained strong cooperation networks and

frequent contact, which in this case meant visits at least once or twice a week. Although half of the widows in my sample were living alone, in most cases their households were by no means independent. Services, money and even temporary residents circulated constantly.

The preference for a locale of residence, in this case near a female family member, is often conditioned by the housing market and existing rent controls and regulations. When renting out apartments was no longer a lucrative business for landlords because rents were frozen and maintenance costs were high, many residents were given the option of buying their dwellings. However, poor widows could not afford to buy, and for many it was actually better to continue paying their low rents. The result is that there is very little residential mobility, giving tenants the illusion that they were homeowners. In a way they were, because leases were inherited and they had the certainty that as long as they were paying rent they were not going to be evicted. In some cases when they decided not to buy themselves, other family members did, as in the case of Rosario, a childless widow who lives with her 24 year old grand-niece. The house belongs to the parents of the grand-niece who bought it at a special price because she was living there, and was not going to move out. Rosario (79) pays for the electricity and her brother contributes with "a little something." The contents of the house belong to her, and she has everything the way it used to be when her husband

was alive. She is allowed to remain there as long as she lives, and she pays for small repairs. However, the situation with her niece is tense -- Rosario said she smacked her once - - and there is no peace in the home because aunt and niece do not talk to each other. Still Rosario acknowledges that when she needs assistance such as filling out forms, she gets help from the young woman. When Rosario feels lonely she goes to visit her female cousin, her *prima*, who lives nearby. In the case of another widow in my sample, her son bought the apartment in which she lived, and brought his wife and son to live there.

It is not uncommon for many widows to live in the house in which they were born. Since husbands tend to move into the wife's home, she would probably have taken care of her aged parents and her older husband. One or both of her parents-in-law might have moved in and she might have taken care of them until they died. Now, in her old age, a daughter or another younger relative may be living in, sharing expenses, and it would be the widow's turn to receive care. When a daughter has more comfortable and spacious quarters, and if the widow gets along well with her son-in-law, she may move into this home. The obligation to care for the elderly is not necessarily limited to family members as in the case of Lourdes.

"I never had any children, I only had a stepdaughter (*enteada*) but I never saw her again after we had disagreements over her father's insurance money. After my husband died, a childhood friend who was very sick moved in with her husband, and I nursed her until the end. The house was put

up for sale and we bought it together, and since I took care of them until they both died, they left me their part, and I plan to do the same. I am already preparing a woman friend who has a retarded daughter, and they are coming to live here, because I don't want to live in a nursing home."

In addition to the desire to have companionship and a good caretaker in old age, the transmission and sharing of convenient and cheap housing accommodations seem to be key to explaining the living arrangements of many widows. Although children continue to feel a moral obligation to care for their parents, and invite them to move in, things seem to be changing now as many widows prefer and can afford to live independently. At the same time, as women join the labor force in greater numbers and have more work responsibilities, they have less time to care for aged parents at home, with many facing the dilemma of placing the elderly in special homes. There are only 230 homes for the aged in the area of greater Lisbon, many of which lack adequate facilities and space for the growing number of elderly. This problem is also noted in other major urban centers where people have to wait for years before they can be accepted.

Nearly, half of the widows lived alone at the time of the interview with me (48%). The other half lived with other family members and/or boarders. Daughters were present in 13.8% of the cases, and sons in 12%. Nieces and nephews also lived with their widowed aunts, particularly when they were childless. In the case of Odete, the "nephew" was the son of her husband's sister. Her "niece" (the nephew's wife) takes

care of the household and buys the groceries. Odete buys fruits and makes small purchases and has practically retired from major household chores. Her "nephew" is the owner of the house. He was renting a room, and when the owners died he bought the apartment. He invited his uncle and his wife to live with them because they were living in poor conditions in a *barraca* (shack).

TABLE 2

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF WIDOWS IN THE SAMPLE

Type of Arrangement	Frequency	Percent
Living Alone	28	48%
Living with Daughter	8	14%
Living with Son	7	12%
Other Family Members	7	12%
Female Boarders	7	12%
Other	1	2%
TOTAL	58	100%

Widows sharing households with other family members is hardly a pattern noted only in the lower classes; on the contrary, wealthy widows are equally or also likely to be living in similar arrangements. Rich widows often have their grown children, single or married, and their grand children living under the same roof. They normally have big houses and,

if necessary, the means to attach a wing to their home so their children or grandchildren can live comfortably with their families. Regina moved from Porto to live in an independent apartment attached to her son's quarters (she does not have daughters). She describes her move as her "second widowhood." Her son lives in a spacious *quinta* with his wife (the owner of the home) and her widowed mother. Two of Regina's married grandchildren will soon be living in apartments attached to the main house. They all have dinner together and jointly attend mass on Saturdays. Regina has breakfast usually alone and when she is at home during the day, fixes herself a quick lunch in her own kitchen. When she needs favors or assistance she asks for help from the main house. These complex household arrangements are hierarchically structured, and everybody knows their place. Seating at the dinner table symbolically marks the position of power of the household members. Thus, Regina's son sits at one end of the table, and at the other his mother-in-law. Regina sits to the right of her son.

Broadly speaking, the household composition of widows in Lisbon includes a variety of arrangements with examples of what would be characteristic of the southern or northern regions of the country. The tendency to have a "nuclear" household formation as noted in about half of my sample is often related to housing space and low rents. Widows who did not have an extra room could not invite family members or have

boarders. Stem systems and other complex arrangements seemed to be common among middle class and rich people. Rarely did widows moved from household to household. Usually it was the case that their children never moved out, or they moved in. When widows moved into other households they did it permanently. Variations in the household composition of widows in Lisbon are closely related to other social processes and are directly affected by the life cycle as well as personal decisions to live alone. When widows chose to live by themselves, they have a number of networks connecting their households with other households and with the wider society.

4. "Matricentrality" and Women's Networks

It has been argued that divisions of family property mark family relations which in turn create specific residence patterns (Davis 1977). Studies of household composition in Europe often note that in cases where land or houses are given as dowry, daughters are favored over sons because they are likely to remain in the village, help in agricultural tasks and care for aged parents. In addition, there is extensive cooperation among women, and a preference for matrilineality (Brøgger 1992, Pina Cabral 1989, O'Neill 1983, Casselberry and Valavanis 1976).

In the case of urban widows who need to secure a place of residence for the rest of their lives, and who have been left alone not by migration but by death, the conditions for the

creation of a household focused on the mother are activated. Although the mother-daughter relationship is the most important, widows have also very strong ties with other female relatives, particularly those of the younger generation. Nieces and goddaughters help their elderly widowed kin, often live together and, in turn, provisions are made for property rewards upon the widow's death. Sisters, female cousins, neighbors and friends are also very important, but they play a slightly different role. They basically provide emotional support and emergency assistance, but their involvement tends to remain outside the household and carry no expectation of a monetary reward. Typically, they go out to run errands (*dar umas voltinhas*) with the widow, or take her out for a stroll, or make the habitual visit to the coffee shop with them. The term *filha* (daughter) is used as a term of endearment among female kin and close friends who belong to the same network.

When I asked the widows to list the family members with whom they had close contact, visited frequently, and exchanged services or goods, they seldom included in-laws. Most mother-in-laws (*sogras*) and father-in-laws (*sogros*) were deceased, and they tended to have better contacts with their brothers' spouses than with their husband's siblings. The latter, called *cunhados* (brothers) and *cunhadas* (sisters), were mentioned as relationships on good terms, but distant. If there are property interests or arguments over inheritances, widows keep

in contact with their in-laws, but otherwise, they rarely see each other.

Fictive kinship continues to have the importance described for other areas of Portugal by, for example, Jorge Dias (1953) or Cutileiro (1977). Among women this relationship is very strong, almost sacred, and is placed essentially at the level of real kin. Goddaughters (*afilhadas*) have been raised as daughters by their godmothers (*madrinhas*), and the relationship between the *madrinha* and the mother, who call each other *comadres*, is very important. *Afilhadas* buy groceries, bring presents and help with household chores in the homes of their elderly widowed *madrinhas*. They sustain very strong emotional ties and honor the moral obligation to cooperate and reciprocate. These intense relationships are very similar to the extensive female networks that have been studied for other parts of Portugal (Cailler-Boisvert 1966, Cole 1991, Brettell 1986, Pina-Cabral 1984).

This so called "matricentrality" often creates problems for women who do not have daughters. It also produces a source of strain for women who are married to an only child. They may find themselves in the middle of a conflict of interest, and with the double burden of caring for elderly people on both sides of the family. Most women speak of their *sogras* in good terms: they are nice and are like "mothers" to them. In talking about the relationship with their own daughters, extremely few widows reported problems or expressed deep

resentment. Emília (79), for instance, complained how her daughter *virou as costas*, (gave me her back), and now they see each other only during the holidays. She is living with her son and his wife, not the ideal situation for her, but she gets along very well with them. Her son is affectionate, and her *nora* helps when necessary. Emília feels hurt by her daughter whom she thinks has not helped her as much as other non-kin people. Several years ago, Emilia's girlfriend left her furniture and the lease to a cheap apartment when she migrated to Switzerland.

The widows who lived with their daughters and their husbands did not mention major tensions or conflicts. The son-in-law (*genro*) seems to know his obligations and his place in the home. His roles are also clearly delimited, he has an outside life, and he can go to the tavern or see his friends in the public places reserved for men. Daughters-in-law (*noras*) can create more domestic conflicts if they marry with the expectation of being the mistresses of their homes. Having a *nora* in her household has been a source of strain and unhappiness for Maria José (72). She had not planned it that way. When her husband of 35 years found himself close to death, he called his only son and his wife Lucia and without consulting his own wife asked them to move in. Lucia made the error of not deferring to her *sogra's* authority and trying to create a household of her own. When Lucia began to measure the windows to make curtains, Maria José felt pushed to the

margins of the home, a place she has occupied ever since. She sold her bedroom furniture and shares a room with her teenage grand-daughter, a mistake that she regrets every single night. Her *nora's* behavior has deeply affected her because she had dutifully taken care of her aunt, who was the woman who had raised her since birth and her aunt's husband, who was not related to her, but had left her an inheritance, and finally her own mother as well. When her aunt became extremely sick, she left her job to attend her 24 hours a day. Bedridden for six years the aunt finally died at 71 years of age. Maria José "went mad" from the sorrow that she felt, visited the cemetery everyday and wore black like a widow.

When Maria José was a baby, her mother Ana became a widow. In those days, life for a woman without a husband and with small children was extremely hard. Ana disgraced the family when she got a "boyfriend" and was punished for not keeping her chastity and "setting a bad example" for her children and the community. As a result, she was thrown out of military housing and her children taken away from her. One son ended up in an orphanage where he died. Maria José did not have any contacts with her mother until her own marriage, when she began to give Ana groceries and a monthly allowance because she was living in great misery. After Maria José's aunt died, Ana moved in, soon after she was hospitalized, and died of cirrhosis. Understandably, Maria José is disappointed because she can not rely on her son and her *nora* to care for

her with the devotion that she had for her senior family members.

In the past, as in the days of Maria José's mother, the choice for many widows was to give their children away to childless relatives or put them in orphanages. This was sometimes the case for middle class widows who were suddenly left impoverished. Assunção (56) told me that her mother was married to a man employed in the Portuguese foreign service. She had remained in Europe, and one day she read in the newspaper that her husband had died in an accident. Since the small indemnity that she received was not enough to support herself and her four children, she gave two of her children to the childless sister of her husband who "adopted" them. Assunção lived with her aunt until she got married and moved to Africa where her husband was employed in the civil service. A few years later, Assunção's husband died in a car accident when she was 33, and she moved back, with her two young children, to her aunt's house in Lisbon where she has lived ever since. With the help of her unmarried son, Assunção is now dedicated to the care of her aunt, who is confined to a wheelchair and needs round the clock attention. Her relationship with her mother is friendly but distant, and they see each other only during the holidays or on special occasions.

Catarina, an 83 year old widow who was married for "52 years, three months and a day," never had children but made

conscious provisions for her old age. When she realized that she was not going to have children she "adopted" a "daughter" who is actually her cousin -- the daughter of one of her mother's sisters. She and her husband had planned to adopt a child from an orphanage but coincidentally, her aunt who lived in Brazil had been left widowed with five children and had returned to Portugal. Catarina asked her aunt if she could have the youngest girl, Teresa, and promised to educate her as a daughter. Teresa is an accountant and a middle aged widow now. Her brothers used to get upset because she called Catarina "mother" when her own mother was still alive. Teresa's children call Catarina grandmother. Teresa lives in the suburbs, but Catarina visits her every Thursday and stays with her, in her own room, from Saturday to Monday. She drafted a will because her "daughter" is legally her cousin. They have a joint bank account, and she states that she feels happy because she has all her affairs in order. She has some savings that will be enough to pay for her funeral. Catarina does not want to leave any troubles to Teresa who did not choose to be raised by her.

However, in the case of Catarina, although she had a "daughter" and a sister, for certain things she relied heavily on the help of her male cousin, who had access to her bank account. He took care of important affairs such as pension documents and funeral and exhumation arrangements. Male kin often linked widows with the bureaucratic outside world

whereas female kin played a different role in terms of emotional and economic support, health care, and daily survival.

The activation of female networks with the aim to create special residence patterns and the informal adoption of girls as old age insurance is noted in all social classes, however, anthropological studies document it more frequently in lower socio-economic groups. When the widows are poor and cannot offer much in terms of property rewards, the emotional ties and moral obligations are cemented in other ways. Girls travel from the provinces to live with their aunts while they attend Lisbon's schools. Paula, for example, cooks lunch for her niece who goes to a nearby college. Others give assistance with child care or by nursing the infirm.

5. Conclusion

Cooperative networks have been often described as part of the survival strategies of urban poor and working-class families. Young and Willmot (1962), Stack (1970), Gmelch (1980) and many others have described the swapping, exchanging, sharing, reciprocating, pooling and other behaviors of "kin" networks, which in the case of Portugal are not restricted to poor urban areas. Non kin members are transformed into kin members serving the additional purpose of strengthening family, friendship and neighborly ties. Patterns of cooperation which are similar in different social classes

are varied depending on the needs and resources of the participants.

Childless widows who were not extensively enmeshed in female networks complained more about loneliness, isolation and fear of living alone, and they spent more time confined in their homes. The ones with the weakest ties do not belong to any organization, and are not affiliated with senior centers. Often their family members have died or are living in the provinces and the contact has become infrequent with the passing of the years. MEV members in general had more active networks which were related not only to their participation in the movement but to the charity activities that they perform. Friendships and cooperative relations have emerged from the frequent and long term participation of widows in MEV's "family." The empowerment that has resulted from participation in MEV is a consequence of the solidification of solidarity ties strengthened through years of collective activism. Female networks become evident in different aspects of everyday life and throughout the life cycle, from the procurement of a marriage partner to the decision of informally adopting children until the death of the husband.

There does not seem to be a marked difference in terms to availability of kinship support and participation in MEV. However, it seems that widows who are not MEV members may have more problems with their children, daughters-in-law and other family members. The explanation may be that MEV widows share

their experiences and receive advice in how to deal with problems with family members.

This chapter has focused on the daily lives of widows as determined by their participation in support networks and household strategies. A clarification of the differences between the terms "family" and "household" was deemed necessary in order to understand the implications of the terminology for social policies directed at widows and their families. Theory on households headed by women should be used with caution, particularly if we consider that some concepts have been controversial. Although widows are a problematic category within this framework since not all widows are heads of household and not all households headed by women are headed by widows, using this framework allows for comparative study. There is some unity as well as diversity in the plight of widows and other women who head households. Widows share with other female heads of households special needs, links between single headship and household size, poverty and the representations of women. State policies offering social benefits in the form of survivors' pensions can reinforce single headship. Many widows prefer this option which often implies independence from family members, and freedom from the duties of a new marriage.

The following chapters analyze in more detail other related issues such as the emotional tensions that are created between family members over remarriage decisions, property

manipulation, and how networks are activated to provide emotional support at the time of the death of the husband.

CHAPTER IV

MARRIAGE AND REMARRIAGE

"A widow is the symbol of faithfulness to eternal love."¹

During the long years of the Salazar regime the government made a clear effort to reinforce the idea that marriage was eternal and could not be dissolved except by death. The relationship between state and church was progressively tightened until in 1940 a concordat was signed denying the right to obtain a divorce to the majority of people who were married in the church.² Marriage was thus redefined not as a civil contract but as a sacred institution. The ideology promoted during this period regarding women's and men's roles in the family paralleled the main Catholic tenets of the indissoluble and sacred family. In 1974 the socialist government amended the concordat allowing civil divorce for church marriages, yet most marriages (72%) are still consecrated by the Catholic ritual, and many people consider their unions "till death do us part." In legal terms, marriages "end" with the death of one spouse, meaning that the surviving person can freely remarry. In the case of many

1 Headline of the first issue of MEV's newsletter in Luanda, 1973.

2 The other type of legally approved marriage was civil for a small minority of non Catholic persons.

widows, however, their marriages do not necessarily "end" because many feel as if they are still married, and have the religious obligation to be faithful to their deceased spouses.

This chapter presents different perspectives about the meaning of marriage and remarriage for Portuguese widows, including those of the law, the church, and the widows themselves. In considering these aspects, two things are highlighted: the reasons these women become married in the first place (a description of their marriage strategies), and how they considered and described their married life. By looking both at statistics and at ethnographic data, the chapter also explores the implications of both the discourse and the economy on remarriage and how that has affected other aspects of the social structure.

1. General Trends in Marriage Dissolution

Statistical data was gathered from 1901 to 1991 on different figures related to marriage, marriage dissolution and remarriage. Before approaching the analysis of these numbers, some clarification is necessary. First of all, the data are derived from continental Portugal and the islands of the Azores and Madeira. The guidelines for census collectors have changed from time to time, and in some periods, data were not recorded at all. For example, in the statistics on marriages dissolved by death the length of the marriage is not always recorded or is recorded differently.

As it was mentioned earlier in this study, the political events of the 1970s had a powerful demographic impact, which in the case of marriage is reflected in several ways. For instance, 1975 has the highest number of marriages in the century. For some reason, 103,125 couples decided to marry in that year alone, followed by 101,885 in 1976. By comparison, in 1991 only 71,808 couples wed, and in 1941 the number was 55,131. Apparently, many couples were already separated and lived in consensual unions. Once divorce became available they formalized their relationships. Divorce, another major demographic consequence of the "Carnations Revolution" in 1974, was formerly possible only for a small minority of non-Catholic marriages. Catholic marriages could only be annulled through a long and expensive process, an alternative only for a small number of people, and they are not accounted for in the statistics.

Following the European trend, in Portugal the number of divorces has grown considerably, twenty times in twenty years. Divorce increased from 0.05 per thousand in 1970 to 1.0 in 1990. The actual number of divorced people is only four times larger, which means that many remarry. The 1991 census listed 217,000 people who were either divorced or separated. Divorced men continue to have a high possibility of remarriage, but this is not so for women. The growing number of divorces is associated with a revision of agreements between the church and the state in 1975 which formerly denied divorce for

Catholic marriages.

Divorce is also higher in urban centers, and is more frequent between the fifth and tenth years of marriage, usually among the middle and upper classes. Another aspect that must be considered in understanding the increasing number of single women is the impact of massive migration which affected the matrimonial "market." An additional tendency noted was higher celibacy and later marriage for women.

Graphic #1 shows the trends in marriage dissolution from 1941 to 1993. It presents the number of marriages celebrated yearly and the percentage of marriages ending in widowhood (see also Table 5 in Appendix 1). Table 3 compares the percentages of marriages dissolved by death and by divorce from 1975, the year in which divorce was allowed again, to 1991.

In 1975, 96% of all marriages that were dissolved resulted in widowhood. This percentage has been steadily going down as a result of the increased divorce rate, to the extent that in 1991 only 81% of all dissolved marriages ended in widowhood. Before 1974, less than 2% of the marriages ended in divorce. In many of the years the adultery of women was cited as the major cause. Perhaps that was not the real reason but the only way out of an unsatisfactory marriage.

GRAPHIC #1

TOTAL NUMBER OF MARRIAGES CELEBRATED
AND DISSOLVED BY DEATH 1941-1993

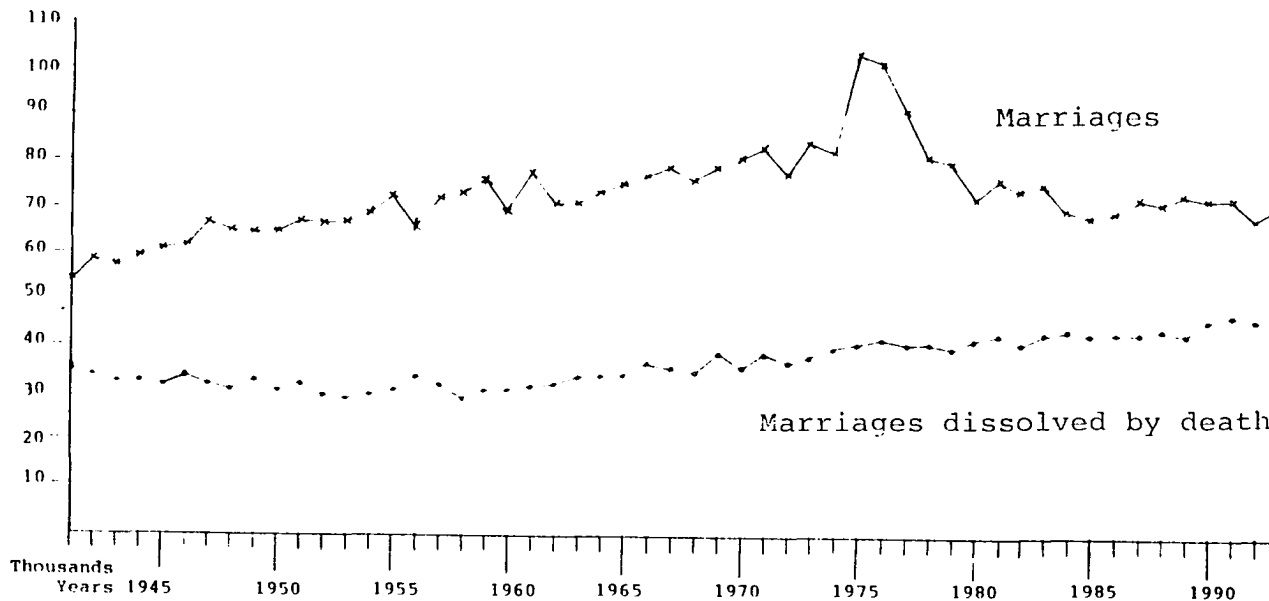


TABLE 3

WIDOWHOOD AND DIVORCE COMPARED BY PERCENTAGES 1975-1991

Year	Total Marriages Dissolved	by Divorce	by Death
1991	57475	18.5%	81.5%
1990	55414	16.6%	83.4%
1989	52820	18.3%	81.71%
1988	53213	17%	83%
1987	51825	17.3%	82.7%
1986	51206	16.4%	83.6%
1985	52301	17.2%	82.8%
1984	50612	13.9%	86.1%
1983	50717	15.7%	84.3%
1982	48053	14.1%	85.9%
1981	49442	13.8%	86.2%
1980	47660	12.2%	87.8%
1979	45888	12.8%	87.2%
1978	47867	14.7%	85.3%
1977	48976	15.9%	84.1%
1976	42363	10.3%	89.7%
1975	42334	3.7%	96.3%

The divorce prohibition for Catholic marriages brought stigma to women who were no longer living with a husband. They were compelled to bear the "cross" of unhappy marriages and resignation was the attitude suggested to endure these relationships. Inocência's account sums up what it meant for her to be in an unhappy marriage for many years, and her thoughts about divorce.

"I am 66 years old. I was married for 35 years and I wasn't happy for an instant. My husband was a swindler and had many defects, our marriage was wrecked by his irresponsibility and squandering. I am still paying his debts. My aunt used to say that there have never been divorces in the family. Divorce at that time was a very ugly thing. And I kept complaining that I couldn't take it anymore. My mother-in-law also told me that I had to endure that because marriage is a very serious thing, and I had married by the church. And I accepted that."

The study of both widowhood and divorce in Portugal has to be examined in relationship to a number of demographic indicators for the last twenty years. Every year fewer people are born and get married while divorce and consensual unions continue to grow, a fact that is particularly noticeable for people less than 45 years old. In a recent study of divorce (Torres 1990) concluded that this was one aspect of changing family strategies, particularly for members of certain social classes. Divorce reached a peak in 1977, a fact that is explained as the legalization of situations in which the spouses were informally separated. After 1979 the divorce rate continued to rise slowly and gradually with the majority of divorces occurring in the area of Lisbon among middle class

people. There are also more divorced women than men because men, who suffer less from stigmatization and often have better paying jobs, can remarry easily. Divorce is more frequent for women between the ages of 25 to 34 than for men of the same age (Torres 1987). Although women have tended to marry men many years their senior, the age difference is less marked now. In the past it took longer for a man to be able to handle all the economic responsibilities of marriage, particularly if we consider that he was expected to be the only breadwinner. In almost half of the past marriages, men were considerably older than women; only in 12% of the marriages were women older than men (INE 1962).

An analysis of the data on widowhood shows that the death rate for married men is greater than for married women during the 20th century. Not only is female mortality generally lower than male, over the course of the century mortality decreased for women while it increased for men. In 1942, men became widowers in 38% percent of the marriages while women were left widows in 62% of the cases. In 1991, 70% of the marriages ending in death were a result of the death of the husband. However, if we consider the ages of the deceased spouse, we see that people die less frequently than in the past during the first years of marriage, particularly in the case of women who today are less likely to die from childbirth complications. Before 1974, women between 20 and 24 years of age had the highest risk of death due to pregnancy

difficulties. In 1941, 7.8% of women who had been married from one to four years died. Until the 1960s Portuguese women had a greater risk of dying between the ages of 20 to 29, a factor related to maternal mortality, while for men the risk increases considerably after their 50th birthday (Lima dos Santos 1970). In contrast, in 1991 only 1.6% of women with less than four years of marriage had died. The largest group of married women who died in 1991 had been married for more than twenty years (86%).

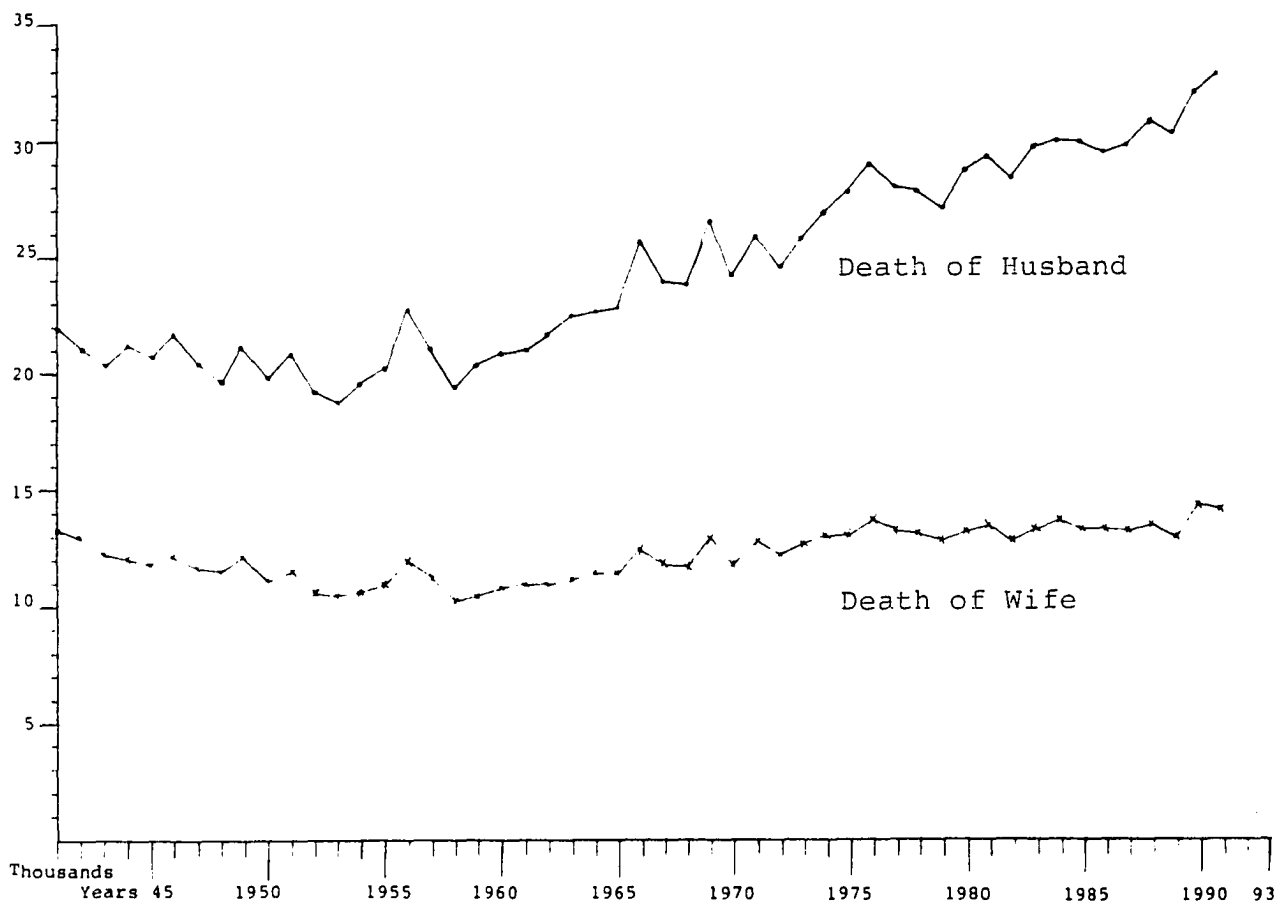
Men had different kinds of risks in the early years of their marriages, a hazard that increased after 1966 reaching a peak in 1970, at the time when Portugal was militarily involved in Africa. In general, men had a higher risk of death after their forties, and after being married for five years. But, as in the case of wives, husbands die at greater rates after they have been married for more than twenty years. Table shows the total number of marriages dissolved by death, and the percentages in which the marriages ended by the death of the husband as compared to the wife.

TABLE 4
PERCENTAGES OF MARRIAGES DISSOLVED BY DEATH, 1941-1991

Year	Total	Death of Husband	%	Death of Wife	%
1991	46856	32790	70%	14066	30%
1990	46198	32044	69.4	14154	30.6
1989	43163	30179	69.9	12984	30.1
1988	44191	30827	69.7	13364	30.3
1987	42877	29767	69.4	13110	30.6
1986	42795	29682	69.4	13113	30.6
1985	43313	29928	69	13385	31
1984	43578	30066	68.9	13512	31.1
1983	42745	29516	69	13229	31
1982	41283	28401	68.7	12882	31.3
1981	42615	29199	68.5	13416	31.5
1980	41817	28557	68.3	13260	31.7
1979	40022	27226	68	12796	32
1978	40824	27810	68.1	13014	31.9
1977	41203	28060	68.1	13143	31.9
1976	42363	28824	68	13539	32
1975	40782	27782	68.1	13000	31.9
1974	39831	26754	67.1	13077	32.9
1973	38446	25770	67	12676	33
1972	36566	24550	67.1	12016	32.9
1971	38867	26036	67	12831	33
1970	35725	23932	67	11833	33
1969	39210	26314	67.1	12896	32.9
1968	35395	23743	67	11652	33
1967	35784	24048	67.2	11736	32.8
1966	36854	24670	67	12184	33
1965	34243	22829	66.7	11414	33.3
1964	33941	22576	66.5	11365	33.5
1963	33626	22381	66.5	11245	33.5
1962	32480	21544	66.3	10936	33.7
1961	32024	21095	65.8	10929	34.2
1960	31497	20759	66	10738	34
1959	30780	20376	66.2	10404	33.8
1958	29475	19361	65.7	10114	34.3
1957	32443	21291	65.6	11152	34.4
1956	34467	22512	65.3	11955	34.7
1955	31035	20135	64.9	10900	35.1
1954	30295	19658	64.9	10637	35.1
1953	29060	18703	64.3	10357	35.7
1952	29728	19138	64.4	10590	35.6
1951	32332	20864	64.5	11468	35.5
1950	31075	19779	63.7	11276	36.3
1949	33274	21133	63.5	12141	36.5
1948	31129	19669	63.2	11460	36.8

Year	Total	Death of Husband	%	Death of Wife	%
1947	32000	20318	63.5	11682	36.5
1946	33844	21659	64	12185	36
1945	32440	20697	63.8	11743	36.2
1944	33053	21133	64	11920	36
1943	32639	20407	62.5	12232	37.5
1942	33990	21085	62	12905	38
1941	35184	21977	62.5	13207	37.5

GRAPHIC 2
MARRIAGES DISSOLVED BY DEATH



It is also important to compare the cases in which the marriages dissolved by death left orphans. Santos (1970) has examined this situation for the period 1959 to 1966 when children were left in 79% of the cases. Combining the age of the surviving spouse with the length of the marriage and the number of children, it was found, obviously, that there were more widows with children, and more children, as the age of the widow increased. The number of widows with children is greater than the number of widows without children after they are twenty years old and have been married for four years. After ten years of marriage and forty years of age, widows with three or four children predominate.

Another interesting trend is the increasing number of marriages dissolved by death in which there were no children, from 20% in 1941 to 25% in 1991. The percentage of widows with no children has been steadily growing, and the raw number is more than double of what it was in 1941,³ which translated in percentages is 18% in 1941 and 26% in 1991.

It has already been argued that marriage strategies are undergoing a process of transformation in Portugal, a process that presents different characteristics according to social class and gender. Torres (1990) has suggested that some of the symptoms of this change are that younger people do not think of marriage as an eternal sacrament, and that conjugal life

³ The Statistical Yearbooks did not include this information before 1941.

now includes the element of uncertainty. Of course, the finances are always a consideration, and people will tend to stay together if that means escaping poverty. But of equal importance are other factors such as the massive entrance of women into the labor market, a general increase in the use of contraceptives, legislative changes pertaining to women and families, and other socio-cultural transformations. The symbols and discourse about love have also changed and the images of sacrifice and suffering are less important. The discourse used by the majority of elderly widows in this study reflects the "traditional" view of marriage. I will demonstrate later in this chapter that many of the widows' strategies and choices are based on a "traditional" view of marriage.

2. Types of Marital Contracts

Another important aspect that must be taken into consideration in the analysis of marriage is the type of legal arrangement used to distribute and control marital property. Before 1939, only three types of marital property arrangement were recorded in continental Portugal: the widely used community property (*comunhão de bens*), followed by separation of property, and a very small number of dotal marriages.⁴ In

4 *Dote* in Portuguese literally means dowry, a word that comes from the ancient Greco-Roman times. The term was used in the past regardless of whether it was given to the bride or the groom (see Osswald 1990). A dotal marriage meant a formal marital contract in which records were usually kept

1939 there were 44,555 marriages in the continent and islands, out of which 43,743 (98%) were with community property, 795 (1.7%) with separation of property and 17 (0.3%) were dotal (dowry) marriages. A new category was introduced in 1940 offering two possibilities of separation of property in marital contracts. This new arrangement gave the choice of absolute division of property, or division with common property. Dotal marriages practically ended with the *Estado Novo*. Curiously, the largest number of dotal marriages (49) since 1929 were celebrated in 1979, after which this form abruptly declined and disappeared.⁵ We can speculate here that perhaps a number of rich parents panicked as a result of the 1974 events in which property was redistributed and nationalized by the socialist government and entered into the last of the dotal contracts in the country. Obviously, these numbers were also affected by the on-going alterations in family and civil laws, as well as by new attitudes about marriage.

Legislative changes to the Civil Code in 1967 had already introduced other types of marital arrangements. After that date the majority of marriages were contracted with "community of acquired property" (*comunhão de adquiridos*). Unless the partners state otherwise this is the normal marriage contract,

in notaries and/or parishes.

⁵ Detailed information on marital property does not appear in Statistical Yearbooks from 1900 to 1928.

followed by "general community property" (*comunhão geral de bens*). The fact that the majority of couples do not make a prenuptial contract means perhaps that only people who are concerned and have significant property at stake sign a document. "Community of acquired property" means, in simple terms and according to a publication from the Office of Family Affairs,⁶ that "what I bring into the marriage is mine, and what we buy is ours." This means that property acquired during the marriage belongs to both partners, as long as the marriage lasts, and cannot be divided up before the marriage is dissolved by death or by separation. Marital property roughly includes things like salaries, real estate, investments, profits and goods bought during the marriage. When one of the spouses receives an inheritance, the person who gives it can decide if the property goes to one marriage partner or to both. Again according to the Office of Family Affairs, "general community property" can be understood as "what is yours and what is mine become ours after the marriage," and in the case of total separation of property "what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours."

Only a small percentage of people actually bother to enter into this type of agreement. Many widows in the study did not know what kind of arrangement they had, indeed only the financially privileged were concerned about these details.

6 Direcção Geral da Família. Guia Jurídico da Família. Colecção Estudos/Documentos 4. n.d.

Likewise, many widows said that they did not worry about prenuptial contracts because they were poor and did not have any property. Rich widows reported division of property, and some said that it was their husband's idea because he had less property and did not want people to gossip or even insinuate that he had married for the money.

For people older than sixty, and for widowed and divorced persons who are entering into marriage for the second time, the law mandates division of property. In addition, people who have children out of wedlock are also prevented from marrying with general community property. In 1991, 71,808 couples married, 89% (64,498) of them with community of acquired property, 6% (4,037) with general community property, and 5% (3,273) with division of property.

Lisbon seems to be the area of the country where the number of marriages with separation of property is growing. In this case, another factor may be influencing the decision of the couple, and it is a transformation in marriage values and expectations. This reflects perhaps a different sense of independence for married women of younger generations, particularly working women who are managing the household finances in different ways, who have their own personal bank accounts and dispose of their property as they see fit.

Another interesting trend noted in the marriage data is that the number of marriages between kin members has diminished dramatically. For instance in 1986 there were only

160 (0.2%) marriages involving kin, out of which 145 were between cousins, nine involved brother and sister in-laws, and six were between uncles and nieces. By contrast, in 1931 there were 698 marriages between people related by kin, 97% of which were among cousins who were marrying for the first time. This is related to two things. There is less need to preserve family property, and people have more freedom to choose their marriage partners. We can presume that there are faint traces of "sororate" and "levirate" in Portugal in the twentieth century, suggested by marriages between in-laws. Statistics show other interesting details. In 1958, there were 34 such marriages in the whole country, 26 women were single and eight were widows; eight men were single and 26 were widowers. Again, the 1970s mark a drastic decline in these types of marriages, to the point that in 1990 there were only three marriages recorded between kin in the country. Before 1980, most marriages between in-laws involved a widowed person. Unions between uncles and nieces were much less common. That statistics seldom mention marriages between aunts and nephews suggests that they were rare.

According to the widows' accounts, in the past, the women of Lisbon tended to select their bridegrooms from their own neighborhood. The ideal man was much older and economically independent from his parents. Occasionally he was supporting his parents or paying for the education of siblings, a fact that was not considered an obstacle but a good sign, meaning

that he was a hard working and responsible man. The selection of a husband was not an independent decision. Several widows talked about their lack of choice, explaining how relatives had arranged their marriages, stressing the interference of relatives and their determination to marry the man they desired.

"My father wanted to end our courtship because my boyfriend was a barber, he even threatened to destroy his will. I was a very dynamic person, and I told him that I had arms to work, and finally they welcomed him in the house. His only defect was that he was poor, but everybody loved him. I have never regretted marrying him. He died in 1958, when I was 44, and I still cry for him sometimes."
(Emília, 79 years old)

Usually the reason why parents opposed marriages was because of a social class difference or a low job status in the groom. Aurora, whose husband was also a barber, recounted how her parents did not consent to the wedding, and as a way to show their disapproval did not give them any presents. Since her husband turned out to be a nice person, her father ended up lending him some money and he opened a general store, and succeeded in improving his social standing. When Aurora's husband died, her own father advised her not to get married again, because men would be interested only in her money. The question of social class was decisive in the choice of a partner and people looked for mates in their same social circle. Fernanda, for instance, mentioned that when she was single, she never went out with rich boys because she knew they were not interested in marriage with a poor woman like

herself.

All of the widows who had married in defiance of their parents' wishes told me that they never regretted that decision, and that they had had happy marriages. In contrast the ones who had arranged marriages complained harshly about wrong decisions imposed on them. Branca, a twice widowed woman, narrates how her first marriage was arranged when her own mother became a widow, and how it was a step for her in trying to escape poverty in the countryside.

"My first marriage was like a dark night, and my life was full of bitterness. It was my aunt who arranged this marriage. The poor thing, she didn't do it because she was mean to me, or because she wanted my misfortune. When people are born they have their destiny marked. And besides, marriage is a gamble (*uma carta fechada*)."

3. Namoro (Courtship)

The period preceding marriage which entails the courtship relations is called *namoro*, and, in the past, it was anticipated to last several years. The new family had to start with a minimum of self-sufficiency and this took time to prepare. Today it means more that the couple will have the opportunity to know each other better. *Namoro* had a different meaning during Salazar's years. It was not uncommon for a man to ask formal permission from a girl's parents to court her (*namorar*), then depart for the colonies for two or three years, returning to marry her after completing compulsory military service.

"It was like that, he asked me if I wanted to be

his *namorada* (girlfriend), and *namorâmos* for four years, but we were not really together for long because he had to go to Africa, and we didn't even have a kiss. My married life was very good, very sweet. As a widow it was terrible." (Lourdes 69 years old)

Things have changed profoundly in this respect particularly in big urban centers. Women do not have to wait several years to amass a trousseau or until their fiances return from abroad. In the lengthy *namoros* of the past, ideally the couple avoided sexual intercourse; indeed they had very limited physical intimacy. This was especially true in the middle and upper class where meetings between *namorados* were chaperoned. Lower class women were sometimes pregnant or already had a child when they married.⁷ Today urban young couples openly show their affection in public places, and increasingly live together before marriage without the blessing of the church. Living together without an official marriage has been a feature of certain rural areas such as the one studied in the south by Bastos (1993).

Marriage is such an important institution that it often structures female identity. One widow told me she felt very sad, even ashamed, because all her friends had husbands to lean on and she did not. Women who had been abandoned by their husbands and divorced women with whom I had the opportunity to talk expressed similar feelings. Often they acquire the

⁷ Brettell (1986) has also described a similar situation in the northwest characterized by lengthy courtships, and high rates of illegitimacy.

identity of widows and behave accordingly. The case of Cristina, a talkative MEV member, is a good example:

"We were very close⁸ until he met this other woman. I consider myself a widow since the day he left me and went to live with her. I would never marry again, I had bad luck already, I would not get into anything else. When I was told that he had died, I went to take care of the funeral. As his wife, I wanted to pay for the funeral, but she was there. There was a scene, her son threatened to kill me. I used to go to the cemetery to bring flowers and they took them away. People censured me because I wore black. But it was bad for me. It was a bitter moment, at church and at the cemetery his lover and I were face to face. Not to have a husband has been a sad thing for me."

4. Civil Versus Religious Marriage

Once a couple decides to marry, they have to agree on whether to have a religious or a civil ceremony. A small percentage of widows had not married in the church; all these women were from lower classes and usually helped to support the household with their own paid work. They frequently mentioned that their husbands were not religious, and that the husbands were the ones who insisted on having a civil wedding. Some of the people who married in civil ceremonies had already been living together for some time. Some couples married because the woman was pregnant, or because of other social pressures. Here, there is an interesting difference between

8 I have translated the original sentence *ele era muito meu amigo* as "we were very close". A literal translation would be "He was my very good friend" but it does not convey exactly the same meaning in English of a person who is intimate, trustworthy and a good companion. This expression is commonly used to describe a good marital relationship.

the widows of MEV, all of whom had been married in church ceremonies and the other widows in my sample. The marital lives of MEV's members were somewhat more traditional, serene and predictable.

It has been already noted that Lisbon often deviates from demographic trends presented in other areas of the country. For instance, women marry later, have been in the work force longer, have fewer children, live more often in consensual unions and have more illegitimate children. Poor women tend to describe their marriages and their lives in general as full of work. Isabel defines her married life as *cheia de trabalho*: "My married life swarmed with hardship, work and struggles to live. I raised my son and had to feed him and feed my husband as well." She also gives practical reasons for her decision to marry. Her elaboration here reflects the "destiny" of poor women with children born out of wedlock.

"I married in my early thirties, and already had a son that wasn't his. I got married because I wanted to raise my son decently. Those were hard times. I worked but didn't make much. Often I washed clothes for other people and then sold fruit in the market. My husband had a daughter, he was a widower. People began to say that it was better to get married, that he was older than me, and if he died his family would throw me into the street, and we got married. He didn't want to, and was whining, and complaining. I was a young girl, I never had the courage to leave him or anything. It was until the end. I endured many things, never had any luck. Then, I had a gentleman for a while, and he also died. He was in his home and I in mine. He was a good man. Never did anything bad. I liked him a lot. With the father of my son...when he was born, he went to visit me one day in the little room where I lived. And he was so shocked by the misery there that he never recovered from that. And he

went to live with another woman, and I never saw him again."

Women like Isabel have, in general, fewer chances of getting married. But for her a marriage was an alternative to escape bitter poverty, or worse, prostitution. For the poor, marriage has the additional function of ensuring survival. Poor widows often give the same answer: "Why would I marry again if I don't need any bread?" Working class women, many of whom labored as seamstresses to support their families, were also forced to delay marriage. The fact that the remarriage of widows has decreased does not mean that they are less interested in romantic liaisons with men. Afraid to lose their survivors' benefits, a few are opting to live in consensual unions or have relationships with men while continuing to live in their own homes. In any case, widows do not talk much about this aspect of their lives, as they still worry about social censure. Only one widow told me that she had had an "adventure," -- with a married man! -- which ended up being a disaster for her. Maria João had been married twice already. Maria João was one of the few women who had outlived two husbands. Her first husband was divorced and twenty years her senior. Her second husband had not been married before and was described as nice. He died when she was 69 years old. Having an "adventure" at her age is a rather unusual situation and she readily remarked that this experience was the result of "great loneliness."

For those who consider a church wedding as the proper way

to be married, living in a consensual union created troubling moral conflicts. This was the case of Gabriela, who married at home, on the same day her husband died, in "*articulo mortis*." They had planned to get married but there was confusion with her birth certificate, because another woman with the same name had married, and the certificate was rendered invalid. She finally received her marriage certificate six months after his burial.

The idea of destiny was mentioned constantly as an explanation for unhappy marriages, as well as for widowhood. A popular saying reflects this idea: "*o casamento e a mortalha no céu se talha*." Both marriage and death are things determined in heaven. Apparently the only way that a woman can have control over her possible destiny -- avoiding the risk of a bad marriage to the wrong man -- is to stay away from men altogether, a tantalizing dilemma which brings us to the issue of remarriage.

5. The Remarriage of Widows

Widows who wear mourning clothes announce through their presentation a renunciation of remarriage. Young and old, they have carried the mark that sets them aside, declaring to the world that they are not sexually available, and that they cannot or are not interested in a second marriage. Paradoxically, the black clothes make widows symbols of

repressed sexuality and desire for some men.⁹ They become objects of lust and monetary interest helping to reinforce the stereotype of the "merry widow," a free woman with an inheritance that she will use to satisfy her passion. This image is found in literary works by men including Camões, Bocage and Herculano (Claranges 1869, del Palacio 1865), and more recently in Pereira (1963). This is an image that widows try to avoid, fiercely arguing that only women who have "vices" are in need of a man. One specific question in my interview asked about their opinion about the phrase "merry widow." Usually the widows laughed, some of them nervously, explaining that there is a clear difference between being merry, as they were sometimes, and being "merry widows" which they were not because they knew how to "respect" themselves. Moreover, passion is for the young and something that is felt perhaps at the beginning of the marriage, but with the passing of the years, what is left is only the companionship, which is a highly appreciated attribute.

The question of honor plays an important role regarding the issue of remarriage, as widows have to take care of their reputation and not encourage gossip. They have to make

⁹ It is interesting to note the changing symbolism of black clothes in the western world. Its association with death is quickly disappearing. Similarly religious uniforms are waning while black and other religious symbols are used by fashion designers to create sexual allure. In high fashion centers black is the color preferred for elegant evening parties and many formal events. I was surprised to see recently in New York brides and bridesmaids wearing dresses that were predominantly black.

themselves respected, and they are proud of not provoking men's advances, proud to be "honest" and capable of taking good care of themselves. Many sayings and proverbs pertaining to the chastity or lack thereof of widows are found in oral and popular traditions, one being the following, collected by Braga (1986:240): "A widow is good and honest only when she is buried,"¹⁰ which constitutes an affront to the honor and virtue of widows.

Priests' constant reminders to widows not to remarry was in part based on Saint Paul's letters and message to the widowed: "It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am. But if they can not control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (I Corinthians 7:8). In the mind of the church, second nuptials are less honorable than a first marriage, and the state of widowhood is more commendable and more perfect to God (Fanning 1913). Several authors have documented the early church's disapproval of the remarriage of widows. Goody (1983), for instance, argued that wealthy widows were encouraged to leave their property to the religious orders. The relationship between chastity, remarriage and the disposal of the widow's property has been examined through the study of practices such as *charivaries*, described for centuries in many parts of Europe (e.g. Goody 1976, Cutileiro 1971, Davis 1971, Pitt-Rivers 1971, see also Thompson 1976). A *Charivary* was the punishment

10 "É boa e honrada a viúva sepultada."

that the community exerted on socially disapproved marriages, distinctively those of mismatched widowed persons. It consisted of a ritual in which young men and older boys performed a noisy ceremony with rattles, cow-bells and other "musical" devices on the couple's wedding night. *Charivaries*¹¹ have ridiculed the remarriage of the widowed in Portugal at least since the Middle Ages (Diogo n.d.), the last recorded instances occurring around 1963. Older women and sometimes men who married again, particularly if there was a marked age difference, ran the risk of being "publicly insulted with a cacophonous mock serenade for nine consecutive nights following the wedding" (Willems 1963, cited by Moitoza).

Although the remarriage of widows has not been explicitly forbidden in Portugal it is not always favored or approved; the idea that the first relation is holier and better remains true, as an old proverb attests:

"The love of a widow is like reheated broth, never as good as for the first husband."

Social prescriptions for remarriage are different from those of marriage. In legal terms there is a period of time known as the internuptial interval restricting the remarriage of widowers to 180 days after the death of their wives and 300 days for women. The rationale behind this difference is that this is necessary in order to clarify the paternity of a child born during this period. Social decency calls for at least a

11 *Charivaries* are called *assuadas* in Portuguese and *cencerradas* in Spanish.

year.

Men are encouraged to find a new spouse or companion as they are apparently seen as unfit to raise children or manage the household alone. There is a popular saying claiming that the grief for the wife lasts only until her coffin is taken out of the house (*dor de mulher morta dura até a porta*). Some widowers even advertise their need for a new wife in the personals section of the popular press:

"Widowed gentleman, with (*casa posta*) furnished home, 43 years old, two daughters, public servant, very honest and hard working, would like to meet a widowed, divorced or single woman to establish a happy home. It does not matter if you are poor, you need to be a good housewife and an honest person. My loneliness is immense and I wait for your call."

This advertisement published in the personals section of the popular journal "O Crime" (Nov 8, 1991) reflects in many ways the "marriage market" for widowed persons. The majority of the people who advertise are single men, followed by widowers and divorcees. Divorced women place far more advertisements than widows. While divorcees stress their bad luck in matters of the heart, widows emphasize their vulnerable financial situation as the reason why they would be interested in a serious relationship leading to marriage. Men prefer single and widowed women, highlighting their desire for companionship and a good housewife. The harsh economic situation in which widows were left before 1974 forced many to write to newspapers, not necessarily looking for companionship or romantic liaisons, but desperately asking for help in the

form of charity. As early as 1968, the writer Isabel da Nóbrega called attention to the constant distressing calls from widows such as the following one published in a daily newspaper:

"Very afflicted widow asks for help from kind hearts. Send your answer to Rossio 11"

This ad would have been unthinkable from a man. Widowed men have different problems and different coping mechanisms. It is still socially acceptable for older unattached men to date women while older women feel uncomfortable with the idea of going out with a man. Helena, an attractive woman who has a birth defect and needs a cane to walk married a widower when she was in her forties. Speaking about remarriage she said that she would not marry again because she is old (she is 62) and people would tease her and make fun of her. She has a good male friend, and as we were leaving the church one day, a bachelor was flirting with her in front of a witness and asking her out. She and the whole neighborhood must have known that his intentions were serious, but she courteously declined.

In considering the economic aspects of remarriage we should keep in mind the question of pensions and inheritance, an issue that will be treated in more detail in the next chapter. An interesting question is to what extent widows prefer to switch a regular pension for an uncertain husband. Martine Segalen (1981) has argued that historically in France

a widow had more independence than a married woman, and that she did not remarry unless there was a strong economic urgency for her to do so. Reaffirming this statement there is a Portuguese proverb saying that a man who aspires to marry a rich widow remains single.¹² And rich widows echo these words: "Why would I do a foolish thing like that and lose my freedom?" Indeed, a widow who remarries may even risk losing her money.

This question of freedom is relative, however. Some widows end up following the wishes of their sons or brothers, and sometimes parents and in-laws. The poor are the ones who tend to remarry more, and many of them end up as widows twice, given the higher mortality rate for men and the fact that they usually marry older men. A second marriage might also mean losing a pension, at least for those who became widows after the end of the Salazar regime in 1974. Some widows actually enter consensual unions rather than lose the usually small pension they are entitled to. The relationship between widows' pensions, cohabitation and marriage became evident in Sweden when the National Widow's Pension Scheme was reformed. Before 1990 all married women (and some non-married) had the right to a national pension. The new legislation applies equally to both husbands and wives but depends on the survivor's own means after a one year introductory entitlement which can be prolonged if there are children under twelve. It is not an

¹² *Quem se fia em viúva rica solteiro fica.*

unconditional right anymore. This provision created an abnormally large number of weddings in the period before the law came into effect, highlighting the economic rationality behind the decision to remarry or to stay in consensual unions (Hoem 1991).

The chastity of widows no longer seems to be a requirement to ensure minimal economic survival within "decent" parameters. To be left a widow in the past could have tragic consequences, as it was for Maria João:

"My life wasn't very good. My father died during an epidemic when I was little. My mother was pregnant at the time and was left very poor, and she had to beg for money and run errands for other people. I don't feel any nostalgia for my youth because I didn't have anything, but I had hope before."

For Amelia's mother it was also a tragedy. She had to give her children away to relatives because she could not support them alone, she had to sell her house and car because she could not afford the payments alone, and she had to step down from her comfortable middle class position because she had no skills and could not find a job.

Table 7 (see Appendix 1) shows the evolution of the remarriage of widowed and divorced persons since the beginning of the century. Despite the very small number of people who divorced before 1974, a very modest percentage always managed to remarry, less than one percent. And of course, that possibility was higher for men. After the end of the dictatorship the number of divorced men and women who remarried increased to 4% for women and 6% for men, three

times higher than the percentages for the widowed, while the number of widowed persons who remarried decreased considerably. Nine percent of the men who remarried in 1922 were widowers while in 1990 they comprised only 2.4%. Widowers tend to remarry twice as often as widows. One explanation for the decrease of remarriage among the widowed is an increase in life expectancy. Marriages last longer and spouses die when they are older leaving survivors who may be too old to remarry. On the other hand, today divorce occurs earlier in marriage, when people are much younger. Another reason may be that people need marriage less for economic reasons or as a vehicle for escaping intense poverty, and young women are less likely to die leaving men with small children.

Table 5 (see appendix 1) provides a more detailed picture of remarriage. It shows the percentages and the actual numbers of widows who remarried with single, divorced or widowed men. Unfortunately this information does not appear in the **Statistical Yearbook** between 1921 and 1910. Before 1910, the year in which the monarchy ended, the remarriage of divorcees is not registered because divorce was not possible before that date. During the first decade of the century, 60% of remarrying widows found single men, and 40% married widowers. Those who were younger and had no children were more likely to start a new relationship with a single man than were older women with children. If we look at the contemporary situation,

we see that only 25% of all remarrying widows find a single mate. The number of widows who marry widowers has increased steadily from 40% to 50%. In the case of widows who married divorced men, the percentages fluctuated between 4% and 5% until 1976, when they jumped considerably and have continued to increase to 25%. Although these percentages show the changing attitudes towards remarriage, it is important to keep in mind that the number of widows who actually do remarry has decreased from 2,251 in 1901 to 927 in 1991. This is of course related to the fact that age at widowhood has increased. Statistics do not tell us how many people lived in consensual unions, but they do show high illegitimacy rates before 1970 and a high number of celibate people (Santos 1970).

6. Other Aspects of Marriage and Remarriage

Some widows were actually happy not having a husband in the house because their husband had set a bad example for the children. Most had thoughts about remarriage, not an unrealistic thought for a large number of young widows, but they gave a number of excuses to explain their determination not to remarry.

For Natalia, it was the fact that she had a daughter.

"Thank God, I never thought about marriage again. My daughter was small and I had to educate her. Perhaps I had lost my mind. My husband was eleven years my senior, very well educated and from a good family. But you know how men are, they are recalcitrant, and I was a pampered girl. It was difficult. I have trouble trying to adapt to men's things. What I miss most is his companionship

though. I don't need a man because I know how to respect myself."

Some widows brought up the fact that they had step-parents, who were described as abusive, as the reason why they did not remarry. There is another popular saying "*mais vale ruim pai que bom padrasto*" translated as "it is better to have a bad father than a good stepfather," which reinforces this anxiety. In one case there were implications of serious abuse by the stepfather, a tragedy that Eduarda did not want to remember:

"Cursed be the hour in which I married. I had a daughter already and he [the stepfather] was so jealous. It was a tragedy. I was disgraced. I had many difficulties and sorrows. It was insane! The father of my daughter was not good either. He was a drunkard, and beat me, and I had to run away from him, stealing the girl."

Obviously, there are other pragmatic aspects that keep widows from getting involved in any relationships with men that may lead to marriage. The decision to remarry is tied to other roles that are equally or more important for women. In the case of Adelaide, who was 39 when her husband died, motherhood played the central role in her life.

"We had a full courtship for five years. I was very happy when we got married, he respected me, he was a good father and husband. His death was like an open abyss. I couldn't believe it until I had to assume its full reality. Then I felt more nostalgia (*saudade*). But God never abandoned us in the difficult moments. I would never marry again. I **am still the wife of my husband**. But I also have six children. I couldn't marry, you also have to be available" (emphasis added).

Widows gave many additional explanations for their

determination to remain celibate. There were those who had to take care of bedridden husbands and they affirmed that not even "if men come carrying bags of gold," would they marry again. Others talked about negative and painful romantic experiences that marked them for the rest of their lives. Widows also explained that they have their pensions and they do not need a marriage to survive because of the improved social conditions of the country, and because their children continue to lend a hand. Most widows admitted that while there are many women who cannot live without a man, they have survived because they know how to take care of themselves. The changing role of the husband is an additional factor that has to be taken into consideration. He is no longer the sole support of the household, and both the husband and the wife have more skills and societal structures to help them survive independently.

Many widows recognize that marriage can have a negative side -- that women often find themselves in unequal relationships and with heavy burdens on their shoulders. As such, they see advantages in not having the pressure of marrying again. One soft spoken widow told me: "Thank God I never thought about marriage again, you know, one good marriage is enough! (*Quem bem casou, bem lhe chegou*)."

MEV leaders mentioned during the training courses that sometimes widows idealized their husbands, granting them virtues that they did not have while softening the rough edges

of the relationship. Perhaps that is the case of women who did not have rocky marriages. Widows who had abusive marriages clearly expressed their fear of getting into a similar relationship. One widow told me that since her marriage had been a "constant stream of wine, blood and tears," she was not going to take that again. Many elaborated on the idea of marriage as a risk, with a high possibility of finding the wrong man, as in the following statement.

"Many widows have married again, several went mad because it was a mistake, they had good men but ended up getting the bad ones, and married drunkards."

Those who described their marriages as good talked about the idea of true love and faithfulness, and that people only truly love once in their lives. They said that if someone claims that they are in love for the second time, they did not really love the first time. This brings us back to the ideology of eternal love.

When widows think about remarriage they have to overcome not only the opposition and interference of their children but of other family members including in-laws. Sometimes these outsiders interfere and look for a possible suitor. Laura's case is an example:

"He died when he was 44, that was 23 years ago. Oh!, I had so much grief and sentiment. His death was the worst thing that happened in my life. My mother-in-law wanted me to marry her nephew. But I never thought about another marriage. God wanted me married to my husband only. There were a couple of men who were interested in me, and wrote me letters. One was a medical doctor who worked in the same hospital where I worked, but I didn't bother

to answer. My only worry was to be able to give a good education, and find a good living for my daughters. Now, I am ready to die!" (Laura, age 68)

Several widows in this study had married twice, and as in the case of single older, and poor women, their possibilities were limited to widowers, divorcees or men of lower status. Rosario (79) is an example:

"My second marriage was when I was almost fifty. He was a widower and had a son and a daughter. They agreed to the wedding because their father was living alone. They got the money and I inherited the furniture and the contents of the house. I married because he offered a house, but we had separation of property. My life is to live without any shame (*Sem nenhuma vergonha do mundo*). I would never marry again. God forbid! What I had was more like a funeral than a marriage. His former wife was buried in the same chapel where we celebrated our wedding, and he was thinking about her! He wasn't a husband really, he was like my brother. All together, I wasn't married for eight years, I never had any luck."

A widow is expected to keep alive and respect not only her husband's ashes but also his memory and his name. If the family of the deceased thinks that she is dishonoring his name she can be taken to court. Although I never heard of a such a case, there is a provision for this in the Family Code.¹³

Despite the relatively high number of widows, many of them young, remarriage continues to be uncommon. In general, in industrialized societies there are no restrictions related to remarriage, but it seems an alternative mainly for the young and the rich. For example in the United States women comprise 77% of the individuals who experience the death of

13 According to the booklet "Widowhood" published by the CIDM.

the spouse, but only 30% of the widowed actually do remarry. Indeed, remarriage is a rare event for widows. American men are more likely to remarry when the wife dies (Zick and Smith 1988).

7. "Love is Stronger than Death"

Despite a separation between church and state in Portugal, marriage for many women is not a just a civil contract, it is a sacrament that does not end with the death of the husband. Pina Cabral (1991) has already argued that this ideal image of the Sacred Family has been a part of bourgeois ideology, reinforced and manipulated by the Catholic Church which has adapted it to daily life through the language of the emotions. Many widows actually behave as if they were still married, as in the case of Ilda, a MEV member and a devoutly religious woman:

"I think that another marriage would be adultery. I stopped crying thinking that. I do as if he were still alive, imagining that he is away, traveling. Other widows think that they are free, not me. I miss him a lot. But we have to get used to that. I said that I couldn't live without him; however, 17 years have passed!"

In their study of the relationship between interest and emotion, Medick and Sabeau (1984) have criticized the contention that people who "marry for love" are free of interest. They argued that material and other interests may not be manifested but nonetheless exist. In the case of Portuguese widows marriage is supposed to be based on love,

but this love is not necessarily "romantic" but marital love; built on loyalty and respect. With those important ingredients a marriage is presumed to grow into a loving relationship. Even in the case in which the widow said that she married for "interest," she acknowledged the existence of an emotional element, and the absence of that "love" was mourned. Similarly, in cases where the marriages were described as disastrous, the widows had mixed feelings and confusion.

Another important component of marriage is "respect," a value that can have different meanings. A husband who respected his wife did not mistreat her, and did not have extra marital affairs. This idea of respect is also fundamental in the decision not to remarry, not only because widows do not know if they will find a man who will respect them, but also because they must continue respecting their late husbands. A number of widows argued that "respect" for their children was a further important reason in their decision not to remarry. If their children were small, the women could not bear the thought of a another man giving orders to the children; or, if their children were grown, they would not approve of the marriage.

The tie of marital love is not cut by the funeral. "Love is Stronger than Death" reads the title of one publication widely quoted by MEV widows (Caffarel, Carré, and Rouquet 1972). Eternal love was described by Carmo as the "sublimation of conjugal love." This love is translated into a number of

mourning practices and veneration such as wearing a pin with the husband's photograph even when his death occurred many years ago, or inserting into conversation a respectful and pious phrase instead of pronouncing his name.

For women, the marriage is supposed to last beyond the grave. Since widows are able to take care of themselves and have cared for others as wives and daughters, they are expected to care for their husbands' soul. With her prayers and monthly masses he will finally enter paradise where she will join him later. Resignation is the attitude suggested by priests, one of whom I heard saying:

"You have to entrust your husbands to God. So he can give the happiness that you weren't able to give him in this world... You have the eternal destiny of praying for him, and to desire good things. Marriage compromises two people so they can attain their final, definite goal, their plenitude. You have the mission to intercede in his behalf, so he will reach heaven while you prepare your own way. Remember that he is closer to the Lord and he will be helping you from there."

Many widows in Portugal, even those who do not belong to MEV, still follow closely the teachings of the Catholic Church, and their participation in religious and charitable activities is highly praised. Many MEV members embrace celibacy and devote themselves to the church. They see widowhood as a vocation that no one chooses but that God gives, and they come to embrace Jesus as the only ideal man. Answering why she did not think about remarriage, Adelaide said:

"I had a cousin who had a big pension from the

navy, we corresponded a lot, but then I decided that I didn't want another man in my life, I married God already. He is the only ideal man, and he holds me closely."

Many find consolation in the thought that if the Lord wanted them to be married they would have never become widows in the first place. Another said that if "the enemy would tempt her into another marriage, she would die on that day" (Lourdes, age 69).

While the priests' discourse was successful in offering support and consolation it contradicted other aspects of the widows' lives and their participation in MEV, such as their self empowerment. Chastity was encouraged with a more or less rigid discourse, which although shaped by one class was prescribed for all women. Priests warned them about becoming "merry widows" and admonished against the perils of freedom, saying things like: "Do not become like those butterflies who are looking for something because there are always clients."

The idealization of marital life sometimes creates conflicts and a contradictory discourse in terms of the family ideal of mother and father at home. When something goes wrong with their children, many widows blame themselves for not having an "authority" figure in the home, and think that they would probably have had fewer problems with their children if the father had been alive. At the same time they acknowledge that they were able to solve their problems, and are very proud of having normal, gainfully employed children, and of their own accomplishment as mothers who took care of their

families alone.

8. Conclusion

My approach in this chapter was to connect the statistics with the real people behind the numbers, and to examine the factors that are conditioning decisions to marry, remarry or cohabitate. First, we took note of the marriage and divorce legislation, examining the ideological aspects, both hidden and explicit, that produce demographic changes. These ideological aspects include views about gender, marriage and widowhood which are also undergoing a process of transformation. Views about the role of the husband also change over the life course. While children are younger the most important role of the husband will be as father, and as children grow older companionship becomes more significant. Likewise, new marriage expectations are redefining women's identities as wives and widows. Today, refusal to remarry can serve as an act of political resistance, although it may be concealed in traditional paradigms.

The experience of the few widows in my sample who had married twice may not serve as enough evidence for generalizations about remarriage patterns. It is worth noting, however, that only one had children but all of them had been working class women formerly employed as maids. Their age was between forty and fifty when they married again. Although it can be argued that younger widows are more open to remarriage

than older widows, many younger widows did not express an open desire to search for another mate.

In the case of Portugal, the combination of a conservative regime with a powerful church on one hand, and the economic conditions of each person on the other, plus rigid cultural norms create a specific pattern in which it is difficult for widows to remarry. Although factors such as improved health conditions have contributed to changes in the general demographic pattern, other things to keep in mind in assessing why many widows do not remarry are the currently less dramatic age difference between husband and wife, and a pension that automatically ends when a widow marries again.

CHAPTER V

THE ECONOMY OF WIDOWHOOD:
INCOME, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

"O que é herdado, não é roubado"
"What is inherited is not stolen"

The death of the husband, whether he was the sole breadwinner or not, has the immediate consequence of reorganizing the household economy and of redistributing his and the family property. Property, in this case, refers to a number of related things. The first is in the form of a salary and its appendage, the pension. Another is inheritance, property reserved under the husband's name, including his personal belongings. In addition, other property transfers and major cash expenditures, sometimes unexpected, occur as a result of a death, for example, hospital and funeral bills.

This chapter deals with the financial aspects of widowhood. First, it gives a general historical background of the institutions helping widows and orphans, as an introduction to the modern social security system of Portugal which is in charge of survivor's pensions. Secondly, it moves to the economic aspects of the widows' households and their survival strategies, followed by an analysis and description of property exchanges at the beginning and end of the marriage. Since pensions are never equal to a full salary, are not always given automatically, and not all widows have access

to inheritances as these may not be divided right away, this chapter also examines the daily strategies of widows and how they make ends meet.

1. Widows and Charitable Organizations

Portugal has a long legacy of charitable organizations closely linked to the Catholic Church that traditionally have given assistance to the elderly, the feeble, the poor, and to widows and orphans. Hospitals, shelters and orphanages were already functioning in the Middle Ages. Throughout history elite and religious women have been prominent in this effort. The mother and the wife of the first king of Portugal, Afonso Henriques, founded several charitable institutions with her own dowry possessions (Ribeiro 1907). In the XIV century the still widely venerated Queen Saint Elizabeth¹ dedicated her life and property to helping the needy, creating numerous institutions such as hospitals, asylums and houses to educate and endow orphaned girls.²

1 There is a widespread cult for this queen, also known as the "Widowed Queen," particularly in the city of Coimbra where she is buried. According to legend she defied her husband, King D. Dinis because he did not agree with her charity work. One day she was leaving their palace with a bundle in her arms, and he confronted her knowing that she was carrying wealth for the poor. Feeling caught she told him that she was carrying roses, and when she unwrapped the package roses began to fall. It is very common in Lisbon to see her statue with the roses in cemeteries adorning the graves. When her husband died she joined a convent and dressed like a nun.

2 The definition of orphans in premodern times in Portugal included those children who had a mother but had no father. See Sá, 1994.

The contributions to the church by European widows have been documented by Goody (1983), who contends that there is a close relationship between the fate of the widow and the property of the church. He argued that the aristocracy had to force widows to remarry in order to protect their landholdings from escaping their hands. However, women were allowed to make wills, which from the Church's point of view meant that part of the testament was a donation in alms. Many widows also founded, joined or supported nunneries. These religious houses offered refuge where widows had protection, lived comfortably and were cared for in sickness and old age.

In the XV century Queen Leonor founded the Institution of Mercy (*Misericórdias*), a powerful social organization which today continues to render tremendous aid. The Brotherhood of Our Lady of Mercy was created with the specific purpose of "redeeming and freeing prisoners, curing the infirm, feeding the poor, marrying orphaned girls and protecting widows" (Ramos 1931).³ Women of all classes have always been encouraged and educated to volunteer their time and labor and to bestow their property on charitable and religious institutions. There were even prescriptions of how best to accomplish this (Rumina 1929). The *Misericórdias* are autonomous entities, financially and administratively

3 In 1931 there were in Lisbon 78 girls under the guardianship of the *Misericórdia*. Upon their wedding they received a dowry of 800\$00 escudos, and one year later if they had a respectable marriage they received an additional amount of cash.

independent, working at times closely with the church. As local institutions they have accumulated and administered important patrimonies, including pious legacies and inheritances. They survive with revenue from the lottery, the aid of private donations, and administration of real estate and other property. An important feature of the *Misericórdias* is that they created a homogeneous welfare system, flexible and not subject to a central bureaucracy (Sá 1994), since each town has an independent charitable institution.

Social and labor struggles of the 19th century propitiated the creation of self organized aid by guilds and trade unions.⁴ Only at the beginning of this century were government employees beginning to be covered by the State. It was not until the 1960s that many workers started to receive social benefits from their unions and similar organizations, excluding agricultural and domestic workers. In 1977 these benefits were constitutionally extended to all Portuguese citizens (Ribeiro 1991). Today, people with special needs receive additional attention from the *Misericórdia*, church based organizations, neighborhood associations, *Juntas de Freguesia*, and private citizens who undoubtedly continue to provide a considerable contribution.

4 Associações de Socorros Mútuos e Montepios.

2. Pensions and Employment

Both the government and the private sector offer a number of social assistance programs which are given directly to the family of a deceased worker. The Social Security Administration gives a payment called "family bonus" (*abono de família*), a lump sum to help finance part of the funeral expenses.⁵ People who do not work for the government have the option of having an amount of money withdrawn from their paychecks, or of including a payment with their annual taxes. This fund is called *Caixa de Previdência* and pays a "death subsidy" (*subsídio por morte*) to the relatives of the deceased, including the spouse, for the immediate needs of the household. It also pays a "survivor's pension" for people who have been married for a year or less, unless the death is accidental and there are children. Government employees also have a "death subsidy" and a survivor's pension with the difference that the "death subsidy" is equal to six months of salary, and the spouse has no restrictions from receiving the survivor's pension.⁶

People who have lived in consensual unions for at least

5 Information on social benefits for survivors was taken from the booklet Widowhood published by the CIDM, 1992.

6 The Social Security Administration has a number of restrictions and regulations regarding the length of the marriage, the age of the deceased, and the number and age of children, among other requirements. The widows who are less than 35 years of age receive a pension for only five years.

two consecutive years have certain rights. The surviving partner is allowed "food support" (*direito a alimentos*), which will be paid from the property left by the deceased if there are no immediate kin members claiming rights on the inheritance. If the deceased was a public employee, the "domestic partner" has in certain cases the right to receive a survivor's pension. If the couple lived together in the same place for five years or more, the survivor can inherit the lease if she or he is not married.

EEC regulations regarding pension benefits are trying to create community standards which in the case of Portugal means, among other things, that the retirement age for women will be increased from 62 years of age to 65. Statistics (Morais 1986) show that people over 65 live primarily out of their monthly pensions (83.4% for men and 81.8% for women), and a considerable number of them still make their living as workers (13.4% are men and 3.0% are women); most of the working elderly are concentrated in Lisbon. More women live off their savings (2.2%) than men (1.8%). Likewise, 12.2% of women depend on their family for financial support, whereas for men the proportion is only 0.8%. The tendency to catalogue the elderly as "non-productive" masks the extent of their work. In the case of women, this work is more invisible because it is usually related to household chores and child care. Many elderly women in Lisbon have to supplement their

income in the informal economy making candy or cakes, helping in church sales, selling crafts to tourists, caring for the sick and doing other "invisible" work. In an otherwise interesting study of a senior citizen center in Lisbon, Ribeiro (1991:75) disturbingly concludes that the main occupation of retired elderly people seems to be "limited to the satisfaction of their biological needs." That assertion directly conflicts with my observations of elderly women, including a blind one who was constantly embroidering and knitting exceptionally fine artisanal creations, which were sometimes donated to the centers and sold at very expensive prices.⁷

There are considerable differences in terms of the income and financial needs of the very old and the younger old. People entering retirement now have better pensions and possibly more savings. Women are at a disadvantage, especially those who were housewives. In Portuguese they are called "domestic women" (*domésticas*), a term that has created some controversy. MEV widows argue that term "domestic" should be used only for pets like dogs or cats but not for women who, although they do not work outside the home, are contributing to society. This contention is part of a crusade for the

7 One crocheted bed spread had an asking price of \$900 US dollars. I also saw antique liturgical cloth restored, cut into small pieces and framed selling for \$300 US dollars each.

recognition of household work and child rearing as worthy services to society that should be compensated by social security and pension benefits. Widows whose only income was derived from the husband's earnings may have a limited spending income compared to those who have their own employment pensions plus their survivor's pensions. That is, this would be the case assuming that the husbands had similar incomes.

If we look at the types of employment that husbands had we will have an idea of the sort of pensions that widows have today. Rich businessmen and other well-to-do men usually did not make payments for pension funds, therefore their widows do not have pensions, which they probably do not need if they inherit or have their own personal property. On the other hand, poor men, some of them self employed, could not afford to have any money withdrawn, and their widows also do not have pensions. Only 13 (22%) widows in this study had husbands who worked for the government both in the army or navy and the civil service. Before 1974, many such employees were also poor, as they only earned military ranks but not much money. This was called the "golden misery" because people only had the glittery decorations. Other common occupations in which it was possible to support a family during the Salazar years were banking, office careers and industry. It was more difficult to support a family for restaurant employees, sales people and

other men employed in lower paying jobs. These men usually had wives who worked both in the formal and informal economy, as seamstresses in their own homes, as domestic workers, cooks and other similar occupations. Only a small number of middle class widows worked in higher paying jobs such as teachers or clerks.

An assessment of the economic situation of widows has to consider their own work history and their education in addition to the husband's occupation. During Salazar's years, women were not generally considered worthy of an advanced formal education, as it was assumed that they needed to be prepared only for marriage. Middle and upper class women usually finished high school, and if they were enrolled in private elite schools they also learned to speak other languages, play music, and other skills necessary for increasing marriageability as well as for an active social life. The occupations that women had in the past were determined by the school and social systems, and by parents' ideals and expectations for daughters. In many cases women did not have much say in the decisions taken by their parents regarding education, jobs and marriage, as in the following commentary:

"In those days elementary school was considered the best for a girl. My uncle wanted me to go to business school, and he was talking about placing me in the same bank where he worked, and had all the papers ready. But the school was for boys and

girls, and my aunt who was raising me didn't like it. My uncle said, 'she is our responsibility, and my colleagues from the bank are going to say that I didn't give her either instruction or position. But since she is your niece, your blood, you decide.' Since all my relatives from her side were all in the fashion industry, and I was the only one who was going to go to school, my aunt said that I couldn't have more than my cousins. I had to become a dress maker. I also wanted to play the piano, I even took a few lessons, and I loved it! But she sent me to the sewing machine, and I spent many years there, working very hard, day and night, and I can not hear the word sewing any more."

The choices for women were very limited and the alternatives were to take extra courses or learn a trade. Only ten widows in this study (17%) had gone beyond the fourth grade and finished high school. An additional ten (17%) were completely illiterate, and the rest (24, 35%) had only one or two years of schooling and barely knew how to read and write. Lower class women, particularly those with little formal education, could only find employment in the informal sector. Some of these women had also worked in agriculture before migrating to Lisbon. There were a few women who worked with their husbands in a family business, usually a store, which they had to manage by themselves or with the help of their children upon their husband's death.

Only thirteen (22%) of the widows interviewed defined themselves as housewives, saying that they never had to work for a salary because the earnings of the husband were enough to support the household. Sixteen (27%) lower class women

worked as maids. There were eleven seamstresses that were from both middle and lower classes; often they worked in ateliers, and one moved on to create her own business. Four more were self-employed. Only a minority of women were in a retirement plan and receiving their own pensions.

In the following narrative Judite talks about the importance of work in her life. This shows some of the gender issues related to women's education and employment.

"I began to work in my teens right after I finished the fourth grade. I was a seamstress, but I didn't like it. I wanted to be a tailor, and I became one. I even worked for the president of the country, Marechal Carmona. It is true! I was working in a famous house, the same place where I met my husband. He brought the uniform that I had finished to the president's palace. He even saw him trying it on. I am sure these things are not important in this interview, right? But a woman was as good as a man in this, and there were different degrees of labor, but the owner was the one who always cut, and when there was too much work, he always called me to the cutting board."

Only a minority of poor widows, some of them very old, did not have survivors' pensions because their husbands died before 1974. Widows seldom received their survivor's pension immediately after their husband's death. One widow told me with tears streaming down her face how she had to fight and it took thirty years for the government to compensated her. She received a lump sum which she invested as a down payment on her home. Usually widows had to find or hire someone to take care of the intricate paper work and to deal with the

bureaucratic maze. This obligation is expected from a favorite son-in-law, a nephew or a male cousin.

Rich widows are in reality a minority. The majority of the widows interviewed (39%) had an income totaling in average 45.000 escudos which is about the equivalent of the monthly minimum wage. An additional 10% had to survive with a monthly income of less than 35,000 escudos. And 12% lived with 15.000, a challenge indeed that requires a number of skills. Only twelve widows (20%) had incomes over 100.000 escudos, and the rest had incomes between 45.000 and 100.000 (see Chart 1 in Introduction for more details).

3. Inheritance

Property transmissions at the time of the husband's death illuminate important dimensions of the interrelation of gender and kinship, ideology, law, and cultural practices. The question of the division of the property and the fate of the widow is an issue that needs careful consideration, as does the evolution of inheritance legislation. The idea that the widow squanders the family wealth, which appears at different times and in different cultures (Menchick 1984), is not an anxiety openly expressed, at least in Lisbon. But, fear of this accusation may be the reason why some widows divide the property immediately after the husband's death.

Access to property affects social relations in different

ways. Pina Cabral (1984) for instance, examined the situation of Northern Portugal where unequal access to inherited land has affected the position of women in local society. Women who did not own land had fewer chances of getting married and were at the bottom of the social scale. Although women throughout Portugal have enjoyed access to inherited property from their parents and their husbands, there were many social forces limiting their administration and free disposal. The consequences of this practice have been documented in the north in the form of high illegitimacy rates, low frequency of widow remarriage and residence patterns in which a widow moves in with her children. Widows are often caught in the middle of battles for property control between their in-laws and their children. On the other hand, the delay in the division of the property is a strategy that can benefit widows who nevertheless continue to have usufruct of the property. Even in those cases in which the property is divided, children and sometimes grandchildren usually do not make any decision without consulting the widow, and she continues to be the person in control.

Portuguese law distinguishes between voluntary and legal inheritance. The voluntary endowments of married people are legally accepted through a will if there was a prenuptial agreement. If a person has a spouse or children, he or she can only donate part of the property. That part, called the

legítima, is calculated according to the number of inheritors and their relationship to the deceased. If a person dies without a will, the law indicates who can inherit. The spouse is the first person in the list, followed by other relatives and finally the state. If the deceased leaves a spouse and descendants, the property will be divided in parts equal to the number of claimants. However, the portion given to the spouse can not be less than a fourth of the whole inheritance.

There is enormous variation in Lisbon as well as in the country in terms of the inheritance systems, and there are no firm rules about sex and birth order. Situations range from cases of impartible inheritance, to property equally divided between brothers and sons, and cases in which widows were the sole inheritors of the property of their in-laws.

There is no general rule indicating when widows have to divide the property (*partilhas*). One way is to do it immediately after the death of the husband, but the preferred way seems to be delaying the *partilhas*, in some cases for several generations. Young widows often had to wait until both their in-laws died, at which point their children, who were already grown, were able to claim their share. Because of inheritance problems many widows and their children stop seeing their in-laws. Assunção mentioned how her relationship with her in-laws was cordial until her widowed *sogra* died, and the division of the property began. It has been a convoluted

process in which she has been representing her two children. A house in Lisbon, another in the countryside, and other property are still in dispute. Such delays in the division of property may have other ramifications for widows who may see a new marriage as a threat to their children's share of the inheritance, or who think that the men are more interested in their property than in themselves and their children.

When their husbands die many widows think that they will die soon after, and they rush to divide the property and give everything to their children, a mistake that they often lament for the rest of their lives. Others have greedy children and other family members who pressure them to sell quickly. For this reason MEV members constantly recommend that widows not make any major decisions in the months following the funeral. The experience of widows who rush to sell or divide the property is to feel abandoned or at the mercy of the person or persons who inherit. One widow gave her apartment and other property to her only daughter who died several years later. Now she is not technically the owner, but she feels lucky that her son-in-law has not married again, so she still has the usufruct, and has a good relationship with her grandchildren, who will inherit her property. Mafalda did not have such luck: she gave everything to her only son, and her daughter-in-law (*nora*) wants to sell everything. She consulted a lawyer who told her that if they divorce the *nora* can get away with a

hefty chunk. Another widow also said that she could not trust her son anymore, because she and her husband had worked very hard, and had secured everything they had with "blood, sweat and tears" and her son was getting into illegitimate business. He had already mortgaged some land in the bank to get himself cash, and on top of everything, he and his father share the same name, and the bank thought that the son was the real owner. Brettell (1991) has explored how property transmission both shapes and is shaped by kinship relations in northern Portugal. She noted that parents specify good treatment as a condition for a child receiving the third share that can be freely disposed.

Serious conflicts of interest and emotion between the widow and her in-laws can lead to endless years of bickering in which no profits are made and houses and land languish. In the past sometimes an executor had to be named to administer the property of the children, as wives were not always considered capable of attending to their children's financial standing, or because there was a prenuptial agreement and division of property. Natália and several other widows had one thing in common -- they were not heirs of their husbands because they had married with a prenuptial agreement, had children, and there were no wills. Natália's husband died in 1961 before the changes in the legislation. Her in-laws

determined that an "inventory"⁸ was necessary, a process that took five years. Since she was the head of the household she was able to administer the property of her children, and was named their "tutor" (legal guardian). A "family council" was also necessary because her in-laws wanted to do things their own way, and she thought that they were trying to hurt her children. Natália was worried because she only wanted the usufruct, and the right to remain in the home, and she did not want to bring outsiders (a notary) to deal with the family affairs. In the end, she was left with the family house and a country house which she rents out. This has helped to pay for her youngest daughter's education and hopefully will pay for her trousseau, as well.

Conflicts between widows and their children tend to be less about who gets what, and more about how she spends and administers the inheritance. One widow complained about her children's censuring her when she sold the old family car and bought a new one. The nature of family conflicts varies according to the social class of the widow. Family conflicts for rich widows tend to be related to claims over property, and are usually more frequent when the widow is younger. We should keep in mind that social class is a major factor in

⁸ An inventory is mandatory when there are small children, and the law is formally involved. It means that all the property (*bens*) and debts of the deceased will be appraised or inventoried before a judge divides the inheritance.

determining how widows fare. Although poorer widows do not have conflicts over property, family members may feel an added financial burden which may result in social isolation of the widow and her children.

Inheriting things is not always a blessing. Ilda inherited land from her parents in Trás os Montes, and from her husband, land in his hometown in the north near the city of Porto. She has practically abandoned the land because she cannot travel easily, and cannot afford to hire people to take care of the property. Her children have absolutely no interest in working the land because they have well paid jobs.

Beatriz, who was one of the few widows whose husband had insurance money, used the expression "Thanks to God we had a little something to assist us," to say that she had some sizable property in the form of houses, stocks and bank accounts. She inherited the house in which she now lives from her in-laws, as well as a house in the country, and a bank account. She added that she took care of her in-laws until the end, her husband was an only son, and they all had a nice relationship. She emphasized that she had not "stolen" anything from her in-laws, had worked very hard when they were old and her comfortable situation was the compensation she received. When other widows inherited from their *sogros* they sold that part and divided the cash in equal parts that they gave to their children.

In the case of Regina, *partilhas* were made exactly one month after her husband died. Her eldest son inherited the greatest part and the other children were compensated. Regina, a "woman of means," had also married with a prenuptial agreement and has a will in which she has already divided her own family property. The principle of primogeniture or *morgadio*⁹ was applied in this case, an uncommon occurrence which only governed the inheritance of entailed estates among the nobility.

Cash, houses (with their contents), leases, land, cars and stores are the main things given to both men and women as inheritance. One widow said that her brother was the only one who inherited when their widowed mother died, but she stressed that she had received a store when she got married so she and her husband could make a living.

4. Trousseaus

The trousseau is a significant aspect of the transmission of property at marriage. The acquisition of a trousseau as part of the dowry has been the case for elite women at least since the 17th Century in Northern Portugal (Osswald 1990). It seems to have been the residual component of the dowry in many areas of the country, and it did not mean that the recipient

⁹ *Morgado* means eldest child, or only child, as well as entailed state.

had to abrogate claims to an inheritance. As noted in general statistics and mentioned earlier, there were still a few marriages which included a formal dowry until 1975.

There is marked regional variation in terms of the dowry rules. Marriages in which a dowry was brought have been noted in northern areas (Brettell 1991, Pina Cabral 1986). Dowry in this case means a promise by the parents of a daughter or a son implying that upon their deaths they will give a predetermined amount of property (Brettell 1991). This defining cultural trait of the Mediterranean area is absent in at least one southern area. Cutileiro (1971) interpreted this absence as the result of greater emphasis on the union of two people who were starting a new family than the union of two groups. Since the emphasis was on having the basic necessities to start a new family the groom was required to have a trade, a business or a profession by which he was able to provide for his family. Finding a home was not always imperative since often the couple had the option of remaining in the parents' home if they were going to take care of them in their old age. Although there are still property transfers at the time of marriage, including houses and land, most property transactions occur at the death of one or both parents.

The trousseau, called in Portuguese *enxoval*,¹⁰ was mandatory for all brides in the recent past. Amassing a trousseau had more or less the same function as described for Italy by Schneider (1985). It had to do with class behavior and accumulation of fine goods, with the possible barter of these items for cash or favors, and with the tightening of emotional ties between female members of the family. A trousseau also denotes the symbolic association of women with purity and secluded domesticity, and we may add, with the sanctity of marriage.

Women proudly described how they made most of the finery themselves, embroidering and adding lace to their own underclothes, linens, tablecloths, curtains, bedspreads and other household items years before the wedding. In some rural areas women cultivated, bleached, spun, and wove the linen used to make sheets and other articles that were later patiently embroidered. After the wedding many made their own and their children's clothes, a very time consuming and expensive process. Women who worked before their marriages put aside an amount of money destined for the *enxoval*. In some cases their employers, particularly when the unmarried women were maids, helped them to amass it.

10 The word *enxoval* is also used for a baby's layette which in the past was handmade by the expectant mother, and female family members and friends. It still includes finery that is passed down generations.

In Portuguese lacework is called *renda*, which curiously is the same word used for revenue, income and rent. Fine lacework and other *enxoval* items are not meant to be used everyday; some are indeed never used, and continue to be passed down from mothers to daughters. Little girls learn early what things they will inherit and look forward to their own weddings when they can claim ownership.

The contents of the *enxoval* varied widely, obviously according to the means and status of the bride. Its description and sometimes display made many widows feel very proud because of the possible redeemable monetary value, their parents' and their own social standing, and their own ability to assemble handmade bed linens, jewelry and even furniture. Grooms also contributed furniture and other items. Although it was not the rule, they generally found a place to live and took care of the paperwork required for the marriage. Modern brides do not have the time to assemble a handmade trousseau and prefer to buy ready made finery in specialized stores. They also have more cash available to buy appliances, using their savings for down payments on apartments, cars and other property. Likewise, the groom and the bride will decide together what to buy for their home. Women from well-to-do families have additional items that ordinary women do not have as part of their trousseau such as silverware, china, expensive furniture, fine religious objects, antiques and

other valuables. As in the case of Italy (Schneider 1985), Portuguese women saved their enxoval for a rainy day, and would sell or pawn their contents in case of need. One woman sold her furniture and other enxoval items so she could buy an airline ticket and join her husband in the United States.

Only in three cases, the poorest of the poor, said that they did not have anything when they got married. It was a matter of female decorum to have at least the *roupa branca* (literally meaning white clothes which can include intimate apparel and bed ensembles), new clothes and a wedding dress. Not having a father to endow the daughters of the house affected their marriageability. Poor widows mentioned that the reason why they had few things was that their mothers were widows or their fathers had abandoned them. Charitable institutions often either donated the items or gave a sum of money to orphaned girls. Maria João recounted how she received a dowry from the *Caixa de Auxílio* of the union in which her father was a member. When she married for the second time she had a house that she had inherited from her first husband. Another woman recounted how she was very poor but had managed to make her own underwear. One widow mentioned that her two daughters-in-law did not have an enxoval and they did not want to get married without one. Another one said that she was poor when she got married, and her parents could afford only a small trousseau composed of half a dozen blankets, four

pillowcases, four sheets, and two pillows. Her husband, an only son, also had a trousseau which included bedspreads and other household items given by his mother. Husbands brought trousseaux in several cases, not an uncommon thing in the past. Apparently a double *enxoval* symbolized not only the mutual contributions to the new household, and ownership of one's own goods but independence from the paternal home (Osswald 1990). Even so, by providing her sons with an *enxoval*, mothers-in-law were investing in their own future, cementing good relationships with their daughters-in-law, as in the case of Beatriz, who married an only child and received a valuable *enxoval* from mother-in-law and mother alike.

Sisters and brothers also helped to buy many household items because a wedding was a considerable expense. Such sacrifices were required since the honor and the integrity of the family was at stake. Aurora's father wanted to borrow money and get a mortgage on the land he had so she could have a party and a wedding gown. But she insisted on just buying a new dress and a small *enxoval* because she still had small siblings at home.

Many widows proudly showed their own embroidery work, opened lavender scented drawers and chests containing finely crocheted tablecloths and linen napkins carefully stored away. Cristina, for instance, insisted on showing me the things she had bought in monthly installments on a maid's salary, when

she did not even have a boyfriend; these items included a set of sheets and pillowcases that were still unused.

An *enxoval* also brings up memories of adolescence, courtship and the early years of the marriage, and often has deep emotional and symbolic meanings. Girls started to prepare their own trousseaus early, often by candlelight in the countryside after other household chores were done, and all the women sat together to share experiences and give advice. For Judite, the white bed linens marked not only the beginning but the end of her marital life:

"I still sleep on the pillow that I brought for my marriage. I had two, but the other I gave to a friend. I still have many things. I used one pillowcase to wrap the bones of my father as he was put into an ossuary, and when my husband died, it wasn't necessary, but I wanted him to be shrouded with the sheet we used on our wedding night, pure white linen embroidered by myself."

Other property exchanges at the time of marriage were given to the couple in the form of wedding presents such as houses, stores, cattle (to those who married in the countryside) and more recently refrigerators and major appliances. Emília's father gave them the family house, again with the condition that she would take care of her mother when he died. In the case of Elvira and Aurora both received stores so their husbands (who were from lower class backgrounds) could earn a livelihood in a more appropriate way to their social class.

5. Disposal of the Husband's Personal Property

Giving away the personal property of the deceased has been considered a closing ceremony, a way to accept that the person has departed forever from the realm of the living. Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson (1976) associated this mourning practice with remarriage permissiveness. This does not seem to be the case in Portugal, as remarriage is not widespread; it rather seems to be a physical and emotional mechanism to accept the finality of death. The disposal of the husband's personal property is a matter strictly handled by the widow. As with the contents of the house, by custom and law she is the person who decides what to do with them. These personal items can include clothing, jewelry, medals, and letters among other things. Widows often get rid of their own clothes and jewelry, since they think that they would not wear them again. In their affliction, they sometimes give away other household items, and dispose of savings in ways that they later regret. This is apparently a common problem which is frequently discussed in MEV meetings.

When Judite's husband died, she thought that it was also her turn to die, and she began to give away her household possessions such as a pressure cooker, quilts and other necessities until she was left with only the indispensable. Upon realizing the foolishness of this action she concluded that it was time to reconsider and adjust to her new life.

This vulnerable emotional state sometimes makes the newly widowed the victims of swindlers, or other people who take advantage of the situation, claiming to be long lost relatives or friends. After the funeral of Conceição's husband, a man she did not know appeared at her door insisting that he was a friend. She gave this man most of her husband's clothes and never saw him again. She thinks that he probably read the news of his death in the papers.

The marital bed, a symbol of sacred union, where children were conceived and sometimes born, and where often husbands died, is another precious object which becomes a source of emotional anguish. What to do with the bed and the adaptation to sleeping alone in a double bed becomes a stressful event. For Judite, 52 years of marriage left her with the custom of always sleeping on the same side of the bed with her arm around her husband's body. After his death her bed felt empty and she was unable to sleep for months. She thought about getting rid of the bed until she decided to put a pillow on his place, and finally was able to rest at night. Some widows can not bear the thought of selling their bedroom furniture but have nevertheless moved to other rooms where their children used to sleep, keeping their bedroom intact. I heard of one case in which a widow sent her bed, a fine and expensive piece of woodwork, to be cut in half. The ones who sell their furniture do not do it because of the money,

considering that they have to buy a new bed albeit smaller, but because the memories are sometimes very painful, and what they miss the most is the companionship, and the presence of a warm body lying next to them. Sometimes they also give away their furniture when they move in with children and there is not enough space, but they risk losing their independence, their privacy and their peace.

When a man dies, he takes his best suit to the grave. After the wedding ring, the clothes are the closest thing to the body of the husband. They are tangible reminders of his presence, with his scent perhaps lingering on them. His clothing, which she would never again wash or iron for him, becomes a symbolic wound to a widow's identity as housewife, and as caretaker of her husband's needs. A robe, for instance, a warm, intimate, embracing, cozy garment can trigger powerful feelings of loss. Adelaide told me that she was unable to touch her husband's robe, which remained hanging in her bathroom for a full year, until she found the courage to gather all his things, give them away to charity and begin a new life. Helena acknowledged that her husband loved to dress very well, and that he had good clothes. She selected one of his best suits and had a seamstress alter it using the fabric for a suit for herself which she wears on special occasions. The man who helped out with the documentation for her pension chose another suit, and the rest of his clothes were given to

the senior center which she and her husband frequented. Children often picked up one or two garments not because they needed them but because they wanted to have a *lembrança* or *recordação* (keepsake), a touch of a loved presence.

Before giving items to charity, which was the preferred way of disposing of clothing, widows always consulted first their male children and then his immediate male kin (brothers first and then nephews and uncles) and close friends. Reacting in a different way, and perhaps trying to exorcise her unhappy life with her husband, Isabel threw out everything that belonged to him. "It was all rags anyway, and I wasn't going to give that to my son" (who had a different father), was the explanation she offered. It is worth noting that selling the husband's clothes for needed income was never mentioned as an option.

A widow always keeps her husband's most important piece of jewelry, his wedding ring. When Felizbela's husband was still alive in the hospital, he put his ring on her finger, and now she also wears his watch. Widows give away his clothing but jewelry they only give away to their children, and in one case a goddaughter, as presents on special occasions such as marriages or graduations. Reflecting on the emotional impact that those personal objects had on her, Elvira said: "My husband's things were everywhere, I had to leave the home for a while because I didn't want to see things

that would make me suffer, and my goddaughter had to help me put those things away." Many keep valuables and other personal things like wallets, razors, documents and books in drawers or chests that they open only when they want to reminisce.

6. Bank Accounts, Wills and Insurance

Before 1974 it was difficult for a married woman to open a bank account on her own. Very few women had personal accounts which they had kept after the marriage. Most accounts were under the husband's name only, and in many cases wives did not have access. Later, spouses began to add their names and keep joint accounts. The poor obviously did not always have enough money to open a bank account. But the elderly poor are now required to have one in order to have their pension checks deposited. Most widows knew the state of their husband's finances very well, and only in two cases did widows lose the money their husbands had in the bank when they died. One woman did not even know the name of the bank in which he had an account. The other knew where he had the money but her name was not on the account, and since they had married with a prenuptial agreement, she could not withdraw it. In another case the husband owed money and had made some unfortunate business transactions behind his wife's back, leaving her a legacy of debts and entangled property.

Bank tellers in Portugal may work in the same bank for the whole length of their careers, getting to know their clients very well. Widows take advantage of relationships with their tellers to withdraw money without paying heavy taxes to the government, as in the case of Judite:

"I didn't have any problem when I went to the bank to take out what he had left me. I wasn't wearing black, I had a beige jacket. And the teller asked me, already? He knew why I was there. I said, yes, and he gave me all the money, and I opened another account."

People often find ways to maneuver around legal matters that can be detrimental to them. Spouses make "donations" (*doações*) to one another or sign their property over to their children, deterring the circulation of property and avoiding lengthy, expensive and cumbersome legal processes. They also add their spouse's name to their bank accounts and to property documents. A donation usually means that a husband was extra attentive to his family's needs, taking care of worldly affairs when he felt close to death.

Wills are legal instruments used basically by people who have significant property. They are also used by people who are married with prenuptial agreements, and by people who do not have children. Since in most cases the division of property is informal, it is not surprising that only three widows mentioned the existence of wills, and only a few more said that they were thinking about drafting one. In talking

about material possessions, many said that their things belong to their children, and they already know what they are going to get, even when one child will inherit more than the others. Maria da Saudade felt that she did not need to write a will, although she has a son and a daughter. She said that it is already agreed upon that her daughter will inherit everything since she is the one who is taking care of her.

Other financial provisions include insurance, which was expensive and not a common procedure because many people were afraid of death and did not want to think about their end. The death of the husband has prompted a number of widows who were still supporting children to get insurance for themselves. In general, people are changing their attitudes about insurance because the EEC is requiring compulsory insurance for a number of occupations and activities. Generally, the widows whose husbands died in car accidents were the ones who received insurance money. Conflict over insurance money sometimes shatters the relationships between the widow and her in-laws.

7. Rich Women and Poor Women: Daily Lives

Portuguese wives have been, for the most part, the controllers of the household purse strings. Typically, a man would give the money to his wife, and she would give an allowance to him. Then she would take care of the domestic and her own personal expenses. Ninety percent of the widows

interviewed answered that they were in charge of the management of the household (*governar a casa*), and the other ten percent said that they had managed their homes together with their husbands.

Elderly women are legendary for their thriftiness; after all they grew up during Salazar's difficult economic times and were affected by the impact of World War II. If they live on small pensions or no pension at all, they have to *esticar o cordel*, stretch the money and make do with whatever they have. Younger people get very annoyed when they insist on turning lights off, and reusing most things, sometimes going to the extreme of saving the water from the last rinse of the washing machine to flush the toilet or mop the floors. On being asked how they survived on those tiny pensions, they used a number of expressions like: "I am not ambitious," or "I am very focused/directed," or "I know how to govern myself," and "I am equilibrated" (*equilibrada*), prudent" (*ponderada*), "economical" (*poupada*), "frugal," and "moderate." A widow said that she has to *dançar conforme a música*, meaning that she "dances" according to the "music" that is playing. If she does not have enough money at the end of the month she will eat bread soup, a "little something" or in a desperate case, a "glass of milk accompanied with tears" for dinner. The widows who are affiliated with a senior center pay a monthly fee according to their incomes, and they get a full lunch and a

late afternoon snack; some also receive help from the *Misericórdia*. Whatever they do not eat they take home for dinner or breakfast. They rarely go out or entertain people in their homes. Once I went out to lunch with five other friends to celebrate a birthday, nothing extravagant; the check came to 14,000 escudos. Later in the same day a widow told me that she had to live a whole month with a pension of exactly that same amount. Evidently, there are many widows, who unless someone invites them, would never be able to afford to eat out.

One woman said that with the money that her children use to buy weekly magazines and newspapers she can buy food for a whole week. She circulates those same magazines among her friends because they cannot afford to buy them, and in her home nothing goes to waste. Many younger people who grew up under better economic conditions do not know how difficult it is to survive on a very small pension. A poor widow will tell anybody who asks exactly how many cubic centimeters of water she used in the previous month. One day I went to visit a poor widow, and hanging from her window I saw her clothesline full of pants, underwear and other male items of clothing. Surprised, I thought that she had told me that she lived alone. I found her in her living room, with a coal iron in her hands, pressing a pair of pants and simultaneously trying to keep the room warm. When I asked her who the pants belonged

to, she said that she did the laundry of two students, by which she raised some additional money.

Adelaide (58) said that she was like the widow of the Bible, she gave everything she could because there was always someone who had more needs than her own. She was able to *passar acima das brasas* (walk above the fire) with the help of her eldest son who began to work when he was fifteen. He does not have any money and has not married because he is still helping his younger siblings who are in college now.

Not all poor widows can count on their female networks for help. Some do not have families and have the added handicaps of old age such as impaired mobility, poor eyesight and hearing, and their friends and neighbors are also needy. They tend to be more confined to their homes and are afraid of dying alone. Others are at the mercy of relatives who are not always nice to them, and who are beginning to see their elderly family members as burdens.

8. Conclusion

Following Brettell's conclusions for Northwestern Portugal (1991), and Lison-Tolosana (1971) for neighboring Galicia, the variations in the timing and nature of legal transactions has a number of basic principles. The most important one is the use of promises of divisions of property as old age insurance and guaranteeing the care of the senior

generation. Another central feature is that the child (preferably a daughter) who is in charge of his or her parents is not forced to remain single but rather may bring a spouse into the home. This child inherits more than the others. As the following proverb expresses it: "*herdade por herdade uma filha na velha idade*," that is, transmission of property to daughters is the best combination to ensure one's old age. Giving more property to daughters was not seen as inequality because the other children were compensated in some way, and because the caring for aged relatives is seen as a devoted sacrifice, a sign of reciprocity and respect and an effort worthy of admiration and reward.

The disposal and transmission of the personal property of the deceased illuminates the social relationships and the cultural values of the society. This aspect should be examined in light of the marital contract of the couple and as a function of the trousseau that the bride and sometimes the groom bring to the marriage. The way property is transmitted is also culturally conditioned. This aspect is closely related to acceptance of remarriage and social stratification. Although Portugal is a country in which remarriage is not favored, a small number of widows do remarry. The decisions of these widows are conditioned by their social class and access to pensions. The consequences for widows of these customary transmissions of property are attenuated by the pension

regimes of the recent Portuguese legislation, which have been extremely important for widows who did not inherit property. This combination of factors determines the quality of material life that a widow has and helps to reaffirm her position in relation to her children, her in-laws and the community. Other emotional and practical aspects of death will be examined in detail in the next chapter, including how widows spend what they inherit from their husbands in caring for their souls.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH AND MOURNING

"To the memory of my beloved and never forgotten husband, as proof of eternal saudade"¹

In 1846, Portugal experienced a peasant uprising, the so-called Revolt of Maria da Fonte. This movement became famous not only because of the predominant role that women played but because of the causes of the insurrection. The Health Code had recently prohibited burials on church grounds and, as a way to isolate the causes of disease, had ordered the creation of cemeteries in the outskirts of towns and villages.² Maria and other women from the village of Fonte in northeastern Portugal felt completely outraged by this measure. Not being able to bury their dead on church grounds meant for them several things. One was that this treatment implied equating people with animals. Another was that the souls of the deceased were doomed to eternal damnation, and perhaps more important, that the dead were separated from the community. According to Pina Cabral and Feijó (1983), for the legislators the deceased were suddenly a source of disease, decaying matter that should not mix with the living, whereas for the townsfolk the deceased

1 Epitaph inscribed in a tombstone in a Lisbon Cemetery

2 For more details on the "question of cemeteries" in Portugal see Pina Cabral and R. Feijó, 1983.

continued to be part of the community of the living, and would have negative influences only if removed.

The new legislation was an especially direct affront to women who felt their ability to care for the souls and memory of the departed, something they could accomplish more easily from the sacred ground of the church was threatened. The revolt spread quickly and other discontented peasants joined in. However, the movement was soon manipulated by a group of people who opposed the monarchy. Finally, it was crushed with the help of Spanish and British armies.

Shortly after that, cemeteries were erected everywhere, and women began to be seen caring for their dead in them. In the past the preference was to place the dead in churches, convents, and near the relics of saints who would hopefully intercede in favor of the person on Judgement Day. Evidence of this custom is widely found all over Portugal in the form of private chapels and tombstones. After the prohibitions, only a few renowned people were allowed to be buried on church grounds such as in the pantheon of the Jerónimos Monastery.

This brief historical account helps shed light on the contemporary attitudes toward death and burial and mourning rituals. The first aspect that will be contemplated in this chapter is how the Portuguese die, or the so called "Good Death," and the role of women in taking care of the dying - now called the terminally ill - at home. Second, the death rituals will be examined including an analysis of mourning and

bereavement practices. A final section will discuss the economy of funerals and the costs of caring for the husband's soul. In general, this chapter analyzes the impact of these rituals on widows and the manner in which they may serve as an additional source of social control.

1. The Good Death

The preoccupation with a Good Death has been present in Portugal since the Middle Ages and is represented in the widely followed cults of Our Lady of the Good Death and Our Lord of the Good End. According to Goldey (1985) this concept presupposed a spiritual preparation and readiness for the event of death. These preparations for the Hour of Death required that all spiritual and worldly affairs were in order, sins repented, enemies forgiven, friends and children blessed and all debts paid.

The best place to die was in the person's own bed, in the company of family members and protected by the church sacraments. Immigrants often returned on a day's notice from far away places for the death and funeral of close kin. The very old or the terminally ill were often brought back to their hometown to wait for death to arrive, and if this was not possible a casket or an urn with the ashes was sent back. This Good Death continues to be in the mind of many elderly widows who feel that they are ready to face it, and are not

afraid of dying. They talk about their preparations for this moment in a relaxed manner.

"I belong to the order of Our Lady of Carmel. I have the complete habit, the robe and everything, I also have a big scapulary. I plan to appear dressed as Our Lady of Carmel, I also belong to the *Filhas de Maria* (Daughters of Mary).³ I wanted to have a mass in the same church where I married, and where I sang in the choir when I was young, but the church does not exist anymore."

The idea of dying at home continues to be central for many people who are terminally ill, for their close family, and for the hospitals because of the increases in medical care and technology costs. A third (23) of the husbands in this study died at home. Many women still take care of their husbands and other relatives until the end even when they are hospitalized. They are involved in the treatments, bring food, clean linens and sleeping gowns, are attentive to the development of bedsores and help to bathe and keep the infirm comfortable. Caring for the dying at home is both positive and negative. It is positive in the sense that the ill may be more calm in their daily environment, and the medical costs diminish drastically. Wives described how caring for their husbands at home made them feel good because they were fulfilling their marital obligations. It was also a psychological preparation for the death of their husbands, and they found consolation in being able to assist them. For

3 Douglas (1969) in his study of death in the Basque country described this voluntary association (*Hijas de María*, in Spanish) for unmarried women, and the role that the association has during the funeral.

Manuela it meant that her husband did not die alone in a hospital room. When his life was ending she was able to call the nuns who lived across the street, and they were able to accompany him in a prayer vigil commending him to God. These prayers often include invocations to Our Lord of Pity, and Our Lord of the Afflicted to help the dying rest in peace.

Yet, caring for the dying at home is a heavy burden that can last for an indefinite number of years. Inocência remembers the three years from the time her husband was diagnosed with cancer of the mouth until he died.

"First he wanted to see Portugal, and say farewells to all his family members. Then he did not want to have more surgery, and wanted to stay home and die on his bed. The doctors asked me if I had the strength to be his nurse, and they went to see him once a week, and brought the medication and the dressings, and they taught me how to wash him, and the general hygiene. It began with a small dressing until he had almost the whole face covered, and the flesh was falling. And he was moaning day and night, night and day for the last four months. He wanted to die with music, and he had the radio always playing, and I was a nervous wreck because I didn't sleep much, and he always wanted the lights on. And when I was finally able to go to bed, he wanted to go to the bathroom. And he could not sleep, I had to move his pillow, change the sheets, change his position. But he kept saying that death was beautiful and marvelous, and all he saw was flowers. He did not see faces, but saw white hands, and music, and finally he died a saint, smiling."

The long illness and suffering of Inocência's husband until he died a "saint" is part of the ideology of the Good Death. He had time to repent, and she was there helping him to die in peace with himself, his family and with God. He had time to give instructions and recommendations to his wife and

son. This moment of death is also used to give verbal testaments, and whatever the dying says has to be respected.

Although a certain amount of suffering is expected, there are limits to the extent the family is expected to bear. It is not acceptable to have a terminally ill person indefinitely connected to machines with the purpose of sustaining life. It is the role of the close members of the family to supervise the dying and make sure that they are clean, comfortable and alleviated of pain. The writer Miguel Torga⁴ in his short stories about the customs and folklore of remote areas in the northeast described the person who was called by the neighbors to "help" the dying in this last stage of their lives. This "professional" known as *abafador*, literally, a person who suffocates, was called by the villagers in case of need.⁵

The moment of death sometimes is said to come with a premonition or an unusual event, such as a particular bird's call,⁶ which is interpreted later as a forewarning. Inocência mentioned how when her husband was dying she was holding her granddaughter when she felt an icy draft, and began to have chills and a cold sweat -- "something that I had never felt before in my life." This premonition is seldom felt by the

4 O Alma Grande. Novos Contos da Montanha.

5 Leite de Vasconcellos (1958) argued that this custom has been explained as an act of resistance by people of Jewish origin. It seems that the dying were *abafados* in an effort to avoid last confessions of religious practices and as a measure to keep the Catholic priest away.

6 The bird mentioned was an owl, or *coruja*.

widow. In the case of Judite, it was her neighbor who suddenly stopped doing the dishes and went to see her because she had the feeling that the state of Judite's husband's health was getting worse. And precisely when she was visiting they both heard a thump as he fell down dead. Many widows are somewhat prepared when the husband has an incurable disease or suffers from a chronic illness but they seldom acknowledge that they are expecting his death because that can be misinterpreted as the materialization of a desire. One woman mentioned that her husband was so sick he had the smell characteristic of the dying so that she knew his time had come.

The custom of having wakes at home is rapidly disappearing. Hospitals, churches and private funerary parlors have special chapels for this ritual which used to be open overnight. When Rosa's husband died at home, she cleaned, shaved and dressed him with the help of a close friend whose family is in the funerary business. The coffin was brought home by the funeral home, and he was taken to a chapel in the neighborhood. Since he died at midnight his burial was scheduled for the next day. The chapel was full of people all dressed in black or other dark colors. Rosa, with great composure, received people at the entrance. There were some periods of prayer in which the Rosary was recited, led by a group of women, and other periods in which people simply talked about Rosa's husband, and family members who had not seen each other in years reacquainted themselves.

The priest arrived only at the end, to say the mass, and the coffin was taken in a funerary car to the cemetery. There was a small procession from the entrance of the cemetery to the grave site. The pallbearers were relatives and close friends of the husband. The same priest led the procession followed by the closest relatives. Everyone prayed and answered the litanies and the responses while acolytes sprinkled holy water and burned incense. After the funeral a small group of people returned to the home of the deceased for a celebratory meal, which was cooked by Rosa.

2. Death Rituals

The rituals of All Saints and All Souls' Day are often blended in a simultaneous commemoration as they are both related to the cult of the dead. Both religious and secular celebrations (some of which have been traced to ancient Celtic times) include masses, visits to the cemeteries and consumption of special foods. Profane festivals are centered around the chestnut harvest and the degustation of a certain wine which often continues until the celebrations of "Saint Martin's little Summer," the name for a spell of warm fall weather (Oliveira 1984). With some variations, funerary customs in Portugal closely follow the Catholic traditions noted in other areas of Western Europe (Badone 1989, Douglas 1969). Before the 19th century the church was in charge of

administering cemeteries which are today under the jurisdiction of the local municipalities.

There are five major cemeteries in Lisbon covering different geographical zones; Ajuda, Prazeres, Alto de São João, Benfica and Lumiar, and a new project in the area of Carnide. There are two other smaller cemeteries, the "British" and the "German." The projected cemetery in Carnide is expected to be a pronounced deviation from traditional burial customs. The designers have planned a garden where people can go for strolls and recreation as well as to venerate the dead (*Público*, February 4, 1992). It seems that this project will somehow minimize the presence of death that is clearly noted in other burial grounds, hiding coffins and simplifying the decorations of the tombs. It will also have the second crematorium in the city, which reflects an increase in the acceptance of cremation as an alternative to traditional burial customs. This changing attitude is part of a transformation in religious ideas about death, immortality, purgatory and caring for the soul.

The oldest cemeteries of Alto de São João and Prazeres were founded in 1835 in areas that were originally located outside the city limits, following a cholera epidemic. After that date burials were forbidden on church grounds. The architecture of these cemeteries has a marked romantic influence reflecting the artistic and sentimental tendencies of the period. They have impressive monuments on which sad

faced angels of death keep company with the deceased. Attitudes toward death and toward life are reflected in the religious symbols and epitaphs. Each cemetery mirrors the economic conditions of the neighborhood that surrounds it. Since people have to be buried near their place of residence, cemeteries located near upper class neighborhoods have a very elaborate architecture and a profusion of monuments and richer decorations. For instance, Prazeres is often listed in tourist guides for the high number of sepulchers and monuments of leaders, famous poets and other prestigious individuals.⁷

The landscape of the cemetery evokes urban architecture and the social standing of the deceased. Often, personal information such as occupation, cause of death, photographs, and messages from family members are artistically incorporated in the gravestones. Epitaphs, rather than glorifying the buried, often speak of the pain and the void left among the survivors, and the efforts of the widow in honoring her husband.

The different kinds of internments vary according to the financial resources of the survivors. The tombs can be permanent or temporary, public or private, individual or familial. It is the responsibility of the survivors to tend the graves. There are different kinds of permanent funerary arrangements in which bodies, bones or ashes can be deposited.

7 A pet cemetery in Lisbon's zoo is also recommended to visitors. Pets have small *campas* on the ground with photographs, stones and flowers.

There are three main styles, *jazigos*, *gavetões* and *campas*. *Jazigos* are private monuments that sometimes look like miniature churches or houses complete with a door, windows, "gardens" and a small cross in the roof. Sometimes the windows have curtains, but in most cases it is possible to see the coffins placed on shelves often covered or decorated with a crocheted or embroidered cloth. Municipal *jazigos* have different sections, one of which is distinguished by the name of *gavetões*, or big drawers, which are used for depositing coffins. *Gavetões* also have doors marked with the name and the dates of birth and death of the deceased that can be opened with a key kept by the next of kin.

If the coffin is to remain above ground, it has to be sealed with lead. This task is done after the mass during which the casket is open and people can touch the body and say their good byes in a very emotional ceremony. Sometimes, coffins are reopened at the cemetery, in the last stage of the burial ritual, after which a grave digger approaches and unceremoniously throws the contents of a bucket on the deceased. The casket is then placed in the grave and covered with flowers, and earth is thrown if it is a *campa*.

When a widow visits she opens the door which can be made of stone, glass or metal, cleans the drawer, dusts and places fresh flowers. Normally there are a number of religious and other objects decorating the tombs. Crosses, images of Our Lady of Fátima and other devotions, and photographs of the

deceased have been the norm, but more recently there is a trend toward inclusion of plastic and glittering ornaments. The construction of new *jazigos* has been suspended because of lack of space. A few that have been abandoned for years are sold in a public auction. The right to use a *jazigo* is passed down the generations through a strict hierarchy of kin relations. Pina Cabral (1991) notes that *jazigos* are not marked with individual names but with family names, and their use presents an interesting opportunity to study the function and structure of family relations. These *jazigos* confer prestige and status to the relatives of the persons who are buried there. Remarkably, gypsies seem to be buying more *jazigos* and other permanent graves, as for many their nomadic life has finally come to an end.

In addition to *jazigos* and the popular *gavetões* there are *campas* which are graves under the ground. These can be permanent and expensive or temporary and cheaper. The difference can be seen in the decorations used and the quality of the materials employed. *Campas* cannot be opened like the other graves, except for a final removal of the bones, and the poorest are simply marked with a cross or a stone but are also cleaned and adorned with fresh flowers. Old *campas* have more information about the occupant. In addition to the occupation and cause of death they often include a poem, a prayer or another message written in stone by the survivors.

The graves that are not permanent are rented for five years and after this period a second burial is necessary. The coffin is opened, and the bones are "picked up" (*levantar os ossos*), and transferred (a ceremony known as *trasladação*) to an ossuary. Sometimes there is a small religious service and a mass attended only by the closest relatives. The bones are kept in coffin-like urns which are placed in permanent ossuaries in smaller drawers or simply placed on shelves in a special room built for this purpose in the cemetery. There are bigger compartments in which the bones of two people can be placed side by side. This second burial, which has been interpreted as a ceremony marking the end of mourning (Rosenblatt et al 1976), is increasingly seen as too morbid. Most widows who participated in this ritual did not express any awkwardness when talking about it, but some mentioned that their children did not want to see the bones of their father or other family members. Some said that they did not want to go through a second burial and for that reason had selected a permanent grave. Isabel for example said that her husband was buried for five years but she never went to reclaim his bones, and she does not know what happened to him because she never went back to the cemetery, and he died more than twenty years ago. Isabel further explained that she had never been very religious but she felt sorry for him. This woman's experience was more common in the past and it varies with the age of the

widow. Poor older widows were more likely to have endured this situation.

"Poor thing, I endured many things. I was young and never had enough courage to abandon him or anything. I was with him until the end. But he never gave us a penny or anything to eat. And yet, I paid some masses for his soul, and put a scarf on my head for two years. Some widows still wear black, what for?" (Isabel 76)

November 1st marks the most important day in the liturgical calendar to honor the dead, and it is therefore a very busy day for widows. The city of Lisbon is readied for the throngs of women who start to arrive early at the cemeteries. Although there are additional bus lines, some cemeteries can only be reached by the old-fashioned system of street cars. These trolleys are full of widows carrying oversized flower bouquets. Some travel in groups exchanging news and information, while others are quiet and look sad. The entrances to the cemeteries are full of movement, with people selling and buying special flower decorations and candles. Women are seen in groups or alone, busily carrying buckets of water, mops, brooms and ladders. When other family members are present, they may help the widow to remove the ossuary so she can thoroughly clean the drawer. The cloth that covers the coffin is replaced with a clean one, stones are bleached, and sometimes the walls and outside of the drawers are washed and painted.

Tradition calls for constant visits to the cemetery. Many widows reported daily visits during the first five years, then

weekly, monthly and finally only on special anniversaries. Widows can spend hours in this ritual, standing in front of the graves praying or mumbling as if they were talking with their dead. Sometimes they bring folding chairs and sit by the grave. In a way it seems as if their husbands have not yet completely departed, particularly for those who can open the drawers and view the coffin. They are almost in physical contact with them since the coffins can be touched. The regular visitors know each other and exchange words of consolation and advice. Sometimes they are friends who live in the same neighborhood and go together to the cemetery. But many have recently reported that their visits have declined and they seldom go alone because they have heard stories of muggings and assaults of widows.

On November First, whole families of gypsies come and "camp out" for the celebrations. The women sit on the ground and light candles with the names of the departed inscribed on them. The tombs are opened and huge vases full of flowers are placed next to them. Newly bereaved women come in groups to lament their dead sometimes chanting, moaning, wailing and deeply sighing while the men, who also wear black and have let their beards grow, sit quietly. There are also groups of younger married and unmarried women wearing bright colors, sometimes carrying children, moving around, talking, exchanging news and catching glimpses of boys. On this particular occasion a large part of the gypsy community was

there to honor five members of the same family who had been killed in a car accident during the summer. The graves of two teenage girls had been decorated with bottles of perfume, lipstick cases and make up sets, perhaps as last reminders of a carefree adolescence and *namoro* that they did not have the opportunity to enjoy.

Often widows speak fondly of their husbands' funerals and graves. One said that his funeral was so magnificent and he was so highly eulogized that he was buried like a hero. Many said that they enjoy those visits proudly, describing how they keep the graves clean and nicely arranged (*arranjinhas*). They also emphasize that their husbands deserve the best, and that they have fulfilled their last wishes, such as in the case of one woman, who said that her husband wanted to be buried near the sea. She made sure her husband was buried in the cemetery of Ajuda in a top drawer overlooking the sea. Joaquina had at some point the responsibility of six graves. In addition to tending her parents' and uncles' graves, she had a friend who had left town and had asked her to mind their mausoleum. She had inherited a *jazigo* herself but is disappointed because her children do not want anything to do with it; they have already decided that they want to be cremated.

There is general consensus that attitudes toward death are rapidly changing in Portugal. Although a strong cult of the dead has been part of the urban and rural culture, younger

people from urban areas do not feel an inclination to continue observing this tradition. In 1989 the small town of Chamusca in the Ribatejo area celebrated the inauguration of a museum-cemetery, dedicated to the study of the customs surrounding death, with a conference about the attitudes related to death. Some of the proceedings of this event follow Ariès (1977) analysis of the development of the European attitudes toward death. They accentuate the fact that the spectacle of death is disappearing from public life, and note how speaking about death is becoming a taboo (Sábado, April 29, 1989, see also Badone).

Nevertheless, the cult of the dead still plays a role in Portuguese culture. Monuments, cemeteries and graves in convents continue to be visited, among those, certain "chapels of bones," abundant in the south of Portugal, which are now touristic attractions. These *capelas dos ossos* were during several centuries the early version of the modern ossuaries. They were repositories of bones of convent residents and were neatly stacked in rows, and circles of skulls, fibulas and femurs, adorned with the mummies of monks.⁸

Another tradition that has almost faded, at least from urban contexts, is the ritual lament by "hired" professional

⁸ In recent years, there has been a profusion of works about death in Portugal in which a number of perspectives from different disciplines have been explored (Coelho 1991, Feijó, Martins and Pina Cabral 1985). But none of these works has been directed toward the cult of death and how it affects surviving women.

women known as *carpideiras*.⁹ These women were usually poor and were "paid" in foodstuffs. They initiated the laments and were often joined by other females from the family of the deceased. *Carpideiras* also accompanied the body to the cemetery since customarily the women of the house did not attend the funeral, as it was believed that they would pass out or attempt to throw themselves on the grave. They were supposed to remain secluded in the home for at least a month. Evidence of this practice in rural northern areas of the country has been noted by Goldey (1985), but she also acknowledges that some people think that this is an exaggerated lamentation and that consequently the ritual is disappearing.

"When the body is about to leave the house, *carpideiras*, relatives, and people who are not part of the family of the deceased but who are part of the reciprocity base begin the scream and *pranto* (an intense emotional expression consisting of a mixture of weeping, sobs and laments) echoing around the whole town, at the same time that all doors and windows are thrown open." (Goldey:99)

Gondar Portasany (1989) argues that the less exuberant contemporary ritual he describes in neighboring Galicia has been affected by a consistent urban influence. He points out the major role the church has had in trying to eliminate what it called an "uncivilized, disrespectful, theatrical, and offensive" performance "that God did not like."

In Galicia as in Northern Portugal, a good funeral called for a good *pranto*, and still does among gypsies in Lisbon (see

⁹ The well known Aurélio dictionary defines as *carpideira* a "mercenary woman who used to cry and wail for the dead."

Nunes 1981). As yet another popular saying goes, *não há casório sem canto, nem mortório sem pranto*, meaning that there are no weddings without songs and no funerals without tears. The performance of these laments, which have to be done by the closest female kin, served different purposes. It was an accepted way to give vent to positive and negative sentiments toward the deceased; it also served to send messages to other deceased members of the family, to celebrate the personal history of the dead, to release anger about an untimely death, and to encourage those present to release their pain while reinforcing social solidarity (Gondar Portasany 1989). These funerary laments and their significance have been studied in detail in Greece as an act of women's poetic resistance and release of emotion (Seremetakis 1991), a social protest (Caraveli 1986), and as the survival of an ancient tradition (Alexiou 1974).

3. Luto (Mourning)

The signs of mourning are temporarily imprinted on the house of the deceased and with a more permanent character on the bodies of women. It was customary to cover mirrors with black cloth, stop watches, shut the windows, draw the curtains, and the house was not cleaned for a period of time, allowing dust to accumulate (Carvalho 1991). When Rosa's husband died she was careful not to turn her TV or radio on

for long or too loud because her neighbors "would talk," and she left the house in semi darkness.

The extensive belief that survivors who do not celebrate the religious ceremonies related to the funeral, and who do not fulfill the subsequent obligations, can condemn the deceased to an unhappy eternal life has been documented by Goldey (1985). This duty sentences the widow to show publicly this responsibility by wearing black for the rest of her life. It has been also documented that the widow had the additional obligation of asking forgiveness for the bad things her husband did and to pay his debts (Carvalho 1991).

In the case of mourning clothes, the practice increases in rigidity and length according to the kinship degree. In the past, both men and women, the young and the old wore dark mourning clothes. Other people who wear black, not as a sign of mourning, but of celibacy are nuns and priests. Black as a mourning color has been documented in Europe, at least since the early Middle Ages, and it seems that widows had imitated nuns and joined convents for several centuries. While the habit of nuns remained unaltered, widows adapted to fashion (Van Os 1995). Many Portuguese queens and other upper class women were patronesses of convents and took the habit when they became widows. When the famous Queen Saint Elizabeth endowed the Poor Clares in the 14th century she stated in her testament that she had taken the habit as a sign of sorrow, sadness and humility and not because of religiosity or

obedience to a particular monastic order (La Figanière 1859). Needless to say this queen set an example that was emulated centuries later by women of all social classes.

The custom of photographing the dead, and the funeral processions from the end of the 19th century to the middle of this century, have left a rich archival record. Children were photographed with their toys, and those who were not able to attend the funeral could admire the expensive casket, the number of flower arrangements and other symbols of status of the family.

Even in the cities many widows still use *luto carregado*, which consists of the rigid wearing of black. The head and part of the face are covered with a scarf, limbs are covered, skirts are always below the knee, underwear is black, only black jewelry or none at all is worn, and no makeup is used. There are also special shoes, without heels, sold in stores catering to widows. In the recent past an additional garment was used with the purpose of hiding and flattening the chest, so as not to call attention to the sensuality of the widow's body. Until the fifties and early sixties many widows covered their faces with veils for several months after the husband's death, a custom that was in vogue in other parts of Western Europe, and had a peak during the Victorian Era. The woman who decides to remove her mourning clothes does it gradually, and almost never before the first anniversary of the death. It seems that in the recent past, men also wore black and let

their beard grow for up to a year. To show mourning some men still wear a black tie or a black band on one sleeve.

The average length of time in which mourning clothes were worn by the widows in this study was five years. For some women the end of mourning often coincides with the small exhumation ceremony while for other women this is not the case. Sometimes during the initial mourning period another family member died and the *luto* was consecutively extended until she ended up wearing black for the rest of her life. Maria dos Prazeres wore rigorous *luto* for twenty years until she decided that it was time to reduce her mourning. She removed only the black stockings and the head scarf when people told her that it was not good for the health and that people did not use it anymore. Many have removed their *luto* following pressure from family members, employers, doctors and friends. Some husbands also had their wives promise that they would not wear mourning clothes. This often means wearing dark colors instead such as gray, navy blue, brown, and an occasional white blouse, even in the case of many MEV members who constantly stress that they should not be slaves of tradition.

Adelaide remembers how the principal of the school where she was a teacher told her to stop wearing black because it was not good for her young students. She followed his advice because she was aware of the spectacle she became to the community, as she went to the cemetery every week with her six

children in tow, all of them wearing dark clothes. "I felt that I was producing *nojo*." The word *nojo* means both the period of mourning, as well as repulsion, repugnance, nausea and other feelings of disgust. Among gypsies the *nojo* is a fifteen day period in which people do not bathe, shave or eat hot meals, and the widows must cut their hair (Nunes 1981).

For many widows, not wearing black for a full five years after the death of the husband means that people will think that they did not love and respect him. The length of the *luto* is supposedly related to the feelings of the widow. *Luto* for the mother or the father should not last more than two years, and less for siblings and children. Although I observed younger widows wearing rigorous black during the earlier years of mourning, they seem to stop wearing dark clothes sooner than older women. Many of the widows who were not wearing black said that the real *luto* is in one's heart and soul not in the clothes. Others said that the dark colors were affecting them and making them more depressed than necessary. Joaquina, who was widowed at 51, expected that she was going to spend the rest of her life in mourning clothes when she was living in her hometown, even though she sweated terribly under her scarf. Now, 22 years later, she thinks that it is not a good idea, because as long as the *luto* is worn, the wound continues to be open. Some widows argued that the *luto* should reflect the way a husband treated his wife. If he was not a good husband he does not deserve to be remembered by his

family, and she should start wearing other colors, particularly red if he abused her: it should be her revenge. Many widows said that they know that the black clothes do not take their husbands to heaven but they nevertheless wear them because it is a way to express the sorrow and the sadness they feel.

Removing the *luto* is for many a special day, a milestone, a turning point in their lives, giving them the sense of renovation, of incorporation in the realm of the living. Fernanda's children had bought her a nice fabric and called the seamstress to her home on the day she turned sixty. It was a surprise for her since she had been wearing black for the previous ten years, and she readily accepted. But she is very careful with her wardrobe, making sure she is wearing her darkest outfits when she goes to her hometown in the Beira Alta, where people are still reluctant to change. For some widows this transition is not easy. They do not feel comfortable wearing regular clothes, and think that they are offending God, and judge that neighbors might interpret this as a desire to remarry. Therefore they try to avoid gossip and not to call attention to themselves. In contrast, one widow decided to remove her mourning clothes in a patriotic act after she heard a priest say that Portuguese widows make their country look sad.

In talking about their feelings and what they do to overcome them, widows who do not belong to MEV gave more

negative opinions, claiming that they felt more isolated and lonely. Irene felt a deep sadness for many years; she hid at home crying and talking to her husband's photograph. Laura was very happy when she was married but she said she was unable to be happy again. During the initial months of her widowhood, Joana kept praying for death to come and take her also. For many it took years to defeat those negative sentiments and take the recommendation that, as one woman said: "A widow has to be calm, accept the finality of death, and enjoy life because she can not spend the rest of her life in solitude and sadness." Another message was that she has to be patient and look for comfort in the company of friends. Many of these widows are not happy with their lifestyles, they complain of being forgotten, and that their friends have abandoned them. A few have no hope for the future because they are also old and it is too late to change their lives.

Although many widows complained that they have been forgotten by people who they thought were friends, they also stopped receiving friends in their homes or going out to social activities because that was part of the mourning ritual. Luisa (69) remarked that many people think that a widow should cry all the time and censure her when she enjoys life. But she recommends that a widow wait at least a couple of months before finding a job, an activity that takes her out of the house. A widow should not be *lamurienta* or bother her family and friends with the interminable laments of her

tribulations, and should not live overpowered by the past because life must continue. On the other hand there is a social stereotype about widows that on the exterior they cry and wear black, but inside they are happy because they are "free." I heard a man saying that "the tears of a widow are like rain drops."¹⁰ Perhaps he was expressing anxiety about his own mortality and at not being remembered later, and trying to suppress the feelings produced by the constant presence and visibility of widows, many of whom have been forsaken and find themselves helpless.

In addition to feelings of grief, the death of the husband leaves other emotions, depending on the character of the marriage and the manner of the death. If the death is caused by an automobile accident, the widow may feel remorse because she thinks that she was not strong enough to make him drive slower. She may feel guilty because she was not with him, or because she was not the one who died. Whatever the cause of his death, she can be very angry simply because he died leaving her alone in charge of small children. She can feel that even when she tries hard, she did not do enough for him when he was sick, that she did not take him to the doctor earlier, or that she was not patient enough with him. If the death is at home after a long illness, she may also feel guilty for having desired the end of his suffering.

10 *Choro de viúva é água de chuva.*

When Idalina's husband died she was washing him in the tub, and all she remembers is her screams asking God to please resuscitate him as he did with Lazarus. She always hoped for a miraculous cure for his heart condition, and she was angry at God for not listening to her.

4. The Economy of Funerals and Caring for the Soul

It was mentioned earlier that survivors usually receive a special subsidy to help pay the burial cost. Funerals can be major expenses requiring enormous sacrifices and adding sometimes a final blow to finances already depleted by hospital stays, medications and nurses' bills. People may go into debt to pay for a lavish funeral which may enhance the social standing of the family of the deceased. Widows reported that often they received contributions from other family members such as children, godchildren and in-laws, in addition to the subsidy they received from their employers. Many people also have the desire to be buried in their hometown, a wish that may result in additional expenses and complications. When Assunção's husband died in Africa she had to pay the equivalent of five months of salary in addition to the subsidy she received. The body had to be kept in a specially refrigerated place for a whole month while the paperwork was completed and it was finally shipped to Lisbon.

In addition to the funeral, there are other long term expenses that are burdensome to the widow. One is the

decoration of the grave. The expenses vary according to the elaboration and quality of the stone. Other costs include a weekly allowance for flowers, a monthly one for masses and candles, and for many, a second burial. In addition, widows also have to buy whole new black wardrobes, or if they cannot afford it they have to send their clothes out to be dyed.

During her marriage Ana Maria (71) saved every single coin, never went to the movies or a restaurant or enjoyed small things in life. When her husband died ten years ago, she paid for a first class funeral, buying the most expensive grave decorations, including a hand carved marble stone that their life savings could buy. She told me bitterly:

"I behaved like an ass, it was the most stupid thing I did in my entire life. I have nothing now, and he has the most beautiful grave in Alto de São João's cemetery. I thought it was the right thing to do. We didn't have any children, and I had no one who would talk me out of it."

Ana Maria bought a perpetual *campa*, but others had bought expensive temporary *campas* that had to be broken and opened for the *trasladação*. The cost of a funeral can vary drastically according to the category of the ceremony, the number of priests, the importance of the church, the style of the coffin and the type of grave. Widows have to pay additional charges if the family does not want the cemetery that corresponds to the residence or the location of the hospital where the husband dies. The number of people who attend the funerary service is also an indication of the prestige of the family.

Many widows remarked that they had spent fortunes on flowers. This tradition is slowly changing. Some widows are opting for plastic flowers, and others are suggesting that it is best to give attention to people when they are alive. They say that flowers are for the living to see and they do not help the dead.

The widow has the task of paying for the required masses, each month on the day of his death, his birthday and the anniversary of the marriage. In addition, many widows give money to charity or alms as offerings for his spirit. Some widows acknowledged that they do not pay for frequent masses as they used to because masses are different now. Priests charge from the equivalent of \$10 to \$30 US dollars, and masses are not individual but directed at many people simultaneously. Fernanda spent her first survivor's pension check on exactly 30 masses for her husband's soul. It is common to see in the obituaries section of the newspapers invitations to the seventh day and thirtieth day masses. These notices also include public gratitude for the manifestations of condolence and sympathy received by the family.

In addition to masses widows communicate with their husbands and intercede with God for their salvation in other ways. With prayers during their regular weekly masses, at the grave and at home they ask for illumination and protection. Many widows also try to keep their memories alive with small altars in their homes where they pray daily. The intense

religious exercises on behalf of his eternal peace and salvation may explain why widows did not report seeing the dead or a belief in ghosts, were not afraid of their husband's spirit, and had no fear of sleeping in the same bed in which the husband had died. This may also have something to do with the dreams that most widows mentioned. When they dream about their husbands he is alive and they are happy. Only a few mentioned frightening dreams. One woman recalled a dream she had in the early days of her widowhood. She dreamt that she knew her husband was dead but he did not, and she was trying to convince him that he was dead. Apparently she succeeded because he never appeared again in her dreams. Overall, such dreams become rare as the years pass.

5. Conclusion

We have seen a number of changes in the ideas related to death and how they are affecting widows. The most visible mourning practices such as the marking of the widow, the visits to the cemetery, and the *trasladação* of the bones of the deceased are slowly disappearing. Burial customs are also affected by the lack of space for permanent graves, which has encouraged the practice of cremation. Cremation simplifies the rituals, diminishes the cost of the burial, and eliminates the visits to the cemetery and the tending of the graves, liberating women for many of their current responsibilities with their dead. Actually, some of the widows have talked to

their children about their desire to be cremated, not wishing to leave any financial or spiritual burdens to them. This work does not call for an elimination of the funerary rituals because they serve a psychological need, and help to celebrate and remember the departed. As we will see in the following chapter, the bereaved benefit from their participation in familiar rituals. MEV's teachings of serving life as another way to evoke the past, and its efforts to relax the severe mourning routines while continuing to practice many rituals, is interesting in this regard. One of these rituals is a monthly meeting, in which MEV members find new meanings in their collective work. Some of these meanings can be contradictory as they serve both to empower and reinforce already existent gender inequalities in the society.

The study of the rituals surrounding male death and mourning, and the way they are interpreted and performed by Portuguese widows, are an important aspect of understanding the position of women in society and of gender relations and family obligations that continue for wives many years after the bones of the husband have become dust.

For many women these obligations are better performed through their participation in MEV. The next chapter describes in detail the participation of women in this movement and how widows cope with the emotional aspects of death by taking advantage of the religious ideology as a tool for self-empowerment and self-realization, accommodating both to new

and traditional roles. MEV has been active in modifying some of the death rituals that have positioned many widows as "slaves of tradition." While the organization does not necessarily seek to change the gender and family systems, its members are struggling to redefine their identity as women from the peripheral position in which they are often placed by the death of their husbands.

CHAPTER VII

COLLECTIVE WIDOWHOOD: THE HOPE AND LIFE MOVEMENT

1. MEV, Serving Life and not Death

MEV's HYMN

*Com amor e fé criamos
Movimento Esperança e Vida
De mãos dadas caminhamos
de mãos dadas caminhamos
Para a terra prometida.*

1

*Quanto tinha em pão e água
Deu a viúva ao profeta
O serviço afasta a mágoa
e da vida à alma inquieta
Quem faz o bem não fica
sem recompensa.*

2

*Jesus ressucita um jovem
A ver sua mãe chorar
Todas as viúvas podem
Seus filhos ajudar
Jesus parou e disse:
Jovem, levanta-te.*

3

*Mary, Viúva e Mãe
Perdeu seu filho Jesus
Como ela nós também
Damos vida junto à Cruz
Mulher, aí tem seu Filho
Eis tua Mãe.*

4

*No meio da Solidão
Pomos em Deus nossa
esperança
Dia e noite em oração
Vivemos nossa aliança
Cristo é Caminho e Vida
Cristo é verdade.*

*With love and faith we
created
The Hope and Life Movement
Hand in hand we walk
hand in hand we walk
to the promised land.*

1

*What she had in bread and
water the widow gave to the
prophet
Helping others keeps away
sorrow
And gives life to the
restless soul
Who does good always
receives a reward.*

2

*Jesus resuscitates a young
man
When he sees his mother cry
All widows can help their
children
Jesus stopped and said:
Young man, stand up.*

3

*Mary, Widow and Mother
Lost her only son Jesus
Like her, we also
Give life near the Cross
Woman, here is your son
This is your mother.*

4

*In the middle of solitude
In God we put our hope
Day and night in prayer
We live our alliance
Christ is the Path and the
Life
Christ is truth.*

The Hope and Life Movements' (MEV) meetings and other collective activities always begin and sometimes end with the group singing their hymn. The lyrics reflect the ideology of the movement. Walking hand in hand, thinking about resurrection, and helping others is the recommended way to dissipate personal sorrow. The hymn also includes powerful symbols taken from the Bible, teaching a widow how to be strong and take care of her children alone. The offering of a poor widow who gives all she had is perceived as more valuable than the treasures given by the rich. A widow who loses her only son deserves the compassion of Jesus to the point of bringing him back to life. Another important symbol is the Virgin Mary, considered the "queen of the widows," the emblem of courage and suffering, a message of hope and faith in the Church. This imagery is constantly elaborated in MEV activities as well as outside the movement, in the regular practice of the Catholic religion. Senior centers not affiliated with MEV included, in their Christmas celebrations, readings in which the Virgin Mary was used as a model to widows and Samuel as a role model for elderly bachelors.

This chapter explores the different meanings that MEV has for widows through observing their monthly and yearly activities, examining their newsletter and other publications, and analyzing the religious discourse. In the first part of the chapter the development and history of the movement is presented followed by a section on recruitment. Next, there is

an analysis of the characteristics of the members in terms of their class backgrounds. A discussion of the manner in which the movement is considered to be an empowering experience follows. Of interest in this chapter is an analysis of the long term participation of members, and how this contrasts with other self-help organizations. The chapter concludes with an examination of MEV in relation to bereavement therapy.

a. History and Development of MEV

MEV's activism goes back to 1958, when eight Portuguese widows went to Lourdes in the company of a priest to participate in a pilgrimage planned by a French organization of widows.¹ Upon their return they decided to create their own group in Portugal. It was an idea that caught on rapidly. By 1966, six Dioceses already had associations of widows, known at the time as the "Spiritual Group of Widows." (MEV, *Movimento Espiritual de Viúvas*). This early organization was not officially recognized by the church or the government, and it did not have outside support. As one of their brochures notes, it was not until 1979 that the movement began to acquire the magnitude that it has today. Many widows initiated their association with the movement in the former colonies and regrouped in Lisbon or in other towns upon their arrival in Europe. MEV's current vice-president opened the first center

¹ The French Association was founded after World War II, and its main mission was to aid war widows and orphans.

in Luanda, Angola in 1968, and in 1973 she began the publication of a newsletter called *Encontro* (Encounter). With the decolonization she moved to Portugal, leaving behind an active center.

Encontro was published until 1983 when the name was changed to *Esperança e Vida* (Hope and Life). This bimonthly publication has a format that always includes an editorial, letters and messages from other members, announcements, and small contributions from priests and other people from outside the movement. The newsletter's circulation is about 2800. It is sold during the monthly meetings for a token fee, roughly the equivalent of a quarter of a dollar.

MEV's statutes were approved in 1977 by the Episcopalian Conference, and in 1989 were given a permanent status. The movement is affiliated with two international organizations of widows and widowers: FICAV (International Federation of Associations of Christian Widows) and the FIAV (International Federation of Associations of Widows, Widowers and their Children). Members keep in contact with, and attend meetings organized by, widows in other countries. As an NGO, MEV receives support for training courses from the CIDM, but most financial contributions are from members. Participation in the organization is voluntary and free. There is no formal subscription and no fees and there are only contributions collected during the meetings.

MEV is structured at three levels. First, the National Committee formed by a board which includes the President, Vice-president, Treasurer and Secretary. This Committee is responsible for the organization of the annual national pilgrimage to Fátima, and another pilgrimage to Lourdes every five years. The movement leaders organize training courses and supply the themes for the monthly meetings. Likewise, they represent MEV in official meetings, communicate with the government regarding situations of injustice to widows and meet with the press. Additionally, there are Diocesan Committees, each with a coordinator. These committees are in contact with their bishop, and have an assistant priest as spiritual director. They are responsible for the organization of centers, which are usually parochial. The centers are each led by a "responsible team" and when possible have an assistant priest. The "responsible teams" mediate between the general members of the diocese and the national committee. With the exception of the region of Trás os Montes, there are MEV Centers all over Portugal including the islands of Madeira and Azores. It is very difficult to say how many members participate in the movement because there are no official registers or subscriptions, and the widows have no obligation to attend. However, their own estimates are around ten thousand widows affiliated nationally.

MEV members participate in a number of activities according to their rank in the movement. There are monthly

meetings, and retreats for militants and responsible teams. Training courses are offered for the responsible teams, and pilgrimages for all members. Each center has its own roster of activities in addition to the suggestions of the national committee. Activities range from local religious ceremonies to trips to the Holy Land.

Discovering previously unknown leadership skills has been an affirmative thing for many of the Center's coordinators.

"Right after I became a widow, a friend of mine who was very active in MEV in Porto asked me to help her launch the movement there. We actually conducted a study of possibilities for a year, and I also evaluated myself, searching for my own identity, and how I was going to use my newly found freedom." (Regina, age 75)

"One day I went to church and I saw a program for the national pilgrimage, and I thought that was something I wanted to do. At first I thought this movement wasn't anything special, but after a couple of meetings I realized how important this was for me. I have been in MEV for about 17 years. I was doing too many things until I decided to be just a center coordinator." (Judite, age 85)

In addition to the newsletter, MEV has other publications that are either distributed at no cost or sold at very low prices. The CIDM in their participation and sponsorship of activities such as the training courses also provides free literature related to different women's issues. These materials are very much appreciated by widows. Handouts are left on tables and by the end of the meeting they are gone.²

² For some unexplained reason information about breast cancer always remained on the table.

Both MEV and the CIDM have written a small guide called "Widowhood." Using accessible language, they explain among other things a widow's rights and the current legislation pertaining to pensions and inheritance, giving also a list of important phone numbers and addresses. Other materials distributed by MEV include religious hymns and passages from the Bible where widows are mentioned.

Another important publication from MEV is the book Caminhando à Luz da Fé "Walking Under the Light of Faith," published in 1988. The first section deals with a summary of the history and accounts of widows in the Judeo-Christian tradition, ending with a message for widows sent by the Pope John Paul II. The second part gives a report on the widow's organizations in different countries, including Asia and the Pacific, closing with a review of the psychological aspects of widowhood and a list of suggestions and tips for overcoming negative feelings.

In addition to the constant message that serves also as a motto in which it is stressed that widows should be closer to the world of the living than to the realm of the dead, MEV has a list of objectives that translate as follows:

1) Help the widows to:

- Exit their isolation and find a certain humane and spiritual equilibrium,
- Study their new life problems in order to be able to face them; loneliness, children's education, work, integration into society,

- Discover meaning in their ordeal and a path that takes them to God in their state of widowhood, whether temporary or permanent, as well as their place in the world or in the Church, or in their new mission in their homes,
- 2) Try to clarify the widow on her rights and guide her to the religious and civil institutions, in order to promote actions conducive to more just treatment for monoparental families.

b. The Monthly Meetings

As mentioned earlier, MEV centers are normally affiliated with a parish. Since many parishes in Lisbon manage senior citizen centers and MEV functions in the same space, there is often an overlap between the three entities. Meetings are conducted in senior centers which are often on parish grounds, always in the same room. The centers conform to the basic structure of the movement. Each center has a responsible team and a coordinator elected locally by the members of the team. The diocesan coordinator appoints the center coordinator when a new center is opened. New centers are created by splitting up centers with too many members, or when a subgroup of widows from the same geographical area decide to create their own center closer to their homes. Attendance fluctuates from 25 to 60 widows. Sixty is considered too big. Sometimes, leaders feel that it is time for them to take on more responsibility, and they decide that the time is ready for moving on, as this story from Maria da Soledade (age 69) testifies:

"I was a member of another center when I heard our priest saying '... and Mary went on to help.' I understood that he was suggesting me that I was ready to be a leader and organize another center. MEV is not the Wailing Wall, we are here to help. I

would never forget the inauguration day. It was extraordinary. I was so nervous that I was sick. I had chosen to deliver the Beatitudes. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.' When I arrived everything was decorated with flowers, it was like a wedding. There were four priests and other people like the Diocesan Coordinator. I do not know many things, I only finished second grade. I thank God. I think it was the Holy Ghost talking through me. It was marvelous! I did not know I could talk like that. It is an indescribable feeling."

Monthly meetings have more or less the same structure. First, the points prepared in the agenda are discussed, then, there are announcements, the taking of the Eucharist and a communal meal at the end. Each month is dedicated to a special event or topic, usually related to the Catholic calendar. November, for example, is the month of the *saudade*, dedicated to remember and commemorate the dead, and May is the month devoted to the Virgin Mary. Most religious themes have to do with spiritual perfection, having faith in God's benevolence, and the distinction between good and evil.

The widows sit facing a table which is located in the center of the room or up front. The leaders are at this table, which later becomes the altar for the religious service after the meeting. When the time for the mass arrives, table covers, often beautifully embroidered or knitted with religious motifs, and flowers are brought out to adorn the altar. The coordinator reads a small presentation prepared for the occasion. The topics discussed vary considerably, from theological or psychological concerns to practical ways to resolve a problem. They give advice and discuss common

mistakes of widows such as giving away clothing and jewelry, or rushing to sell property or making big decisions without a clear mind. The priest arrives only at the moment of the mass and stays for the meal that closes all the meetings. Everybody contributes to this small feast where new members are introduced and birthdays are celebrated.

From another perspective, I interpreted this ceremony as giving anonymous and poor women an opportunity to shine. For many it is their only chance to socialize and be pampered by others. It allows each one feel like an important person who deserves to be seated with a higher ranking person such as a priest or with women from other social classes. Some bring prepared food or snacks, and others help to serve and clean up later. I once saw a heavy-set woman walking awkwardly with a cane happily going up and down the meandering stairs and corridors leading to the meeting room. She puffed and gasped but managed to get to the room smiling, thanking God for her ability to be there.

In their effort to abolish the practice of rigidly wearing black as a sign of mourning, and as a way to be readily identified in the pilgrimages, MEV members decided that each Diocese would be distinguished by a brightly colored scarf. Yellow is the color worn in Lisbon, and a yellow scarf is tied on the necks of most widows during their meetings. But, for several reasons, many MEV members continue to wear black. Antonia promised her husband on his death bed that she

would wear it for the rest of her life, and that is why she does so; nevertheless, she encourages other widows to wear different colors, and does not censure anybody. Those who join MEV enjoy the meetings and dress for them within the margins of accepted fashion for widows. Neatly groomed and carefully coiffed, they usually wear dark clothes.

Priests also advise widows not to wear the signs of widowhood on their bodies and they recommend against the abuse of black clothes since:

"with the alleviation of the colors comes the alleviation of the spirit. We have a strong image of death, and we are excessively attached to a tradition that does not contribute anything to our personal feelings."

The following account by Judite reveals how she was able to overcome her feelings about mourning customs and her effort to break away from tradition:

"I was recently widowed when I heard our priest talk about marriage and the custom of wearing two wedding rings. I had my husband's ring on, and mine as I always did. I also had a small ring securing my husband's ring. Of course he wasn't speaking to me in particular, but I heard him. He said that a woman should use only what her husband put on her finger. He said many other things, including offering advice and recommendations that gave me a lot of courage. A couple of years ago, I celebrated ten years with MEV. On that day I went home with a friend. After she left, I made myself comfortable, went to my room to think about the things that I heard. I wasn't thinking about another marriage... I was married for 52 years, and we were never angry at each other, only little things. I removed my rings, as the father had told us. And I have felt happy. I wore black for a year. The same priest had said that it was very sad, and that we should look to heaven and not the earth. I used to go to the cemetery every week, and I began to think that his body is here but he is with God. I go now only once

a month. It is the same thing with the masses. It used to be once a month on the 26, the day he died, then on his birthday, and on the anniversary of his death. Now it is just three masses, and as long as I am alive, it will continue like that. That's it! And I have felt all right."

MEV meetings are usually seen by family members, friends and neighbors as innocuous and harmless, and socially approved for widows because of the strong religious component. For many, attending means liberation from the responsibility of paying for masses for their deceased husband. One communal mass a month offered for a husband's soul is more than enough to fulfill this obligation.

c. The Pilgrimage

"The national pilgrimage to Fátima is always a powerful moment in the life of MEV, because it helps us to partially separate from our duties and daily schedules for a time of internal silence while it contributes to the strengthening of ties among dioceses.... The conferences that we had are full of clarifications, others are loaded with spirituality, different, but all very opportune. Everyone listened with great attention, because all of them without exception, opened up horizons, and ventured into paths leading us to assume our widowhood, and from there to value women at all levels, particularly their determination and fulfillment in the contemporary world where they have great challenges" (*Esperança e Vida*, May 1993).

The number of participants in the 1993 pilgrimage to Fátima was about 5000. This number was estimated by the capacity of a large auditorium in the Center Paul VI which was completely full. The increasingly large number of pilgrims to this annual ritual has forced the National Committee to divide

up travelers according to their region of residence in the country. Many members expressed dissatisfaction with this change because they now are able to see friends from other regions every two years rather than every year. A recently developed practice allows members who are not formally participating to arrive on Sunday morning and have their own ritual with the people from their communities and their friends after lunch. Each center organizes travel and makes their own hotel reservations and transportation arrangements.

The preparations for the pilgrimage last for months. It is not an obligatory activity, but most make an effort to go, even if it means an additional expense, often traveling with their parish priest. For some it is such an important event that they take care of themselves in a special way. For example, they buy new clothes and treat themselves to a visit to the beauty parlor. For women like Fernanda the pilgrimage means more than that: "See", she said showing me empty spaces in her dentures, "I am having dental work, and a crown fitted tomorrow, I need to look pretty in Fátima." Fátima is located in the middle of the country, and the longest journey takes about eight hours. Widows use modern and comfortable means of transportation, and bus loads of women arrive joyfully singing religious hymns.

Fátima has been a pilgrimage center since 1917 when three young peasants reported apparitions of the Virgin of the Rosary. This place grew into an international pilgrimage

center where mass is given in many languages. Fátima also became a symbol of mystical nationalism during the Salazar years. Among the messages transmitted by the peasants one specifically asked for the end of communism in Russia and the conversion of its people to Catholicism. An analysis of the political and commercial aspects of Fátima is not within the scope of this work, but it is worth mentioning that the economy of the prosperous and growing town centers on the hotel and souvenir industry while there is an intense religious, almost supernatural feeling in the air. Fátima is structured in ways similar to other pilgrimage sites not only in the Catholic world but in other religious traditions.³ Although some people come as secular tourists, most have a sacred quest. The healthy, ill and disabled do the Stations of the Cross, visit the holy trees, wells and shrines, pay vows (*promessas*), ask for cures, bring flowers, light candles -- sometimes in the shape of the body part they want to be healed -- and walk on their knees or crawl to the blessed image of the Virgin.

The pilgrimage is always scheduled after Easter, on the last weekend in April, often corresponding to the national holiday celebrating the anniversary of the end of the dictatorship. This time of the year is very significant because it is considered a time to meditate on the meaning of resurrection. Although the official inauguration is on a

3 See Turner, 1974 "Pilgrimages as Social Processes."

Saturday, many begin to arrive on Friday evening. The celebration lasts two days, ending at noon on Sunday. On Saturday afternoon, the widows gather in the Center Paul VI for communal ceremonies and a series of lectures. Some of the topics presented in 1992 were "Our Lady, the Mother of the Century" and "From Fátima to the World: Message and Mission." The members of each center sit together filling the auditorium completely, and when their diocese is called they wave their scarves. At the end there is a powerful moment of unity and solidarity when everybody waves their scarves simultaneously. The mass celebrated on Saturday afternoon is sumptuous and ornate, and is officiated by all the priests present dressed in their complete vestments. The moment of communion is impressive as everyone wants to participate. There is always a question as to whether there are enough hosts for everybody, while a group of MEV members help with their distribution, a process that takes quite some time. MEV members and priests are, for this moment, at almost the same ritual level.

After dinner the widows meet again in the Chapel of the Apparitions to recite the Holy Rosary, closing with a candle light procession. On early Sunday morning they do the Sacred Stations of the Cross, recite the Rosary, closing with a general mass in the Sanctuary where they renew their consecration to Our Lady. It is an awesome sight to see this formidable number of widows, most of them dressed in black from head to toe, waving their colorful scarves and marching

with their elaborated banners. Each center brings a banner, usually decorated with MEV's motif, a cross with two entwined rings, symbolizing a man's wedding band and a smaller one for the woman, and the name of their diocese embroidered on it. The feeling of unity and community is overwhelming. In this pilgrimage they reaffirm their sisterhood, with class distinctions blurred, as women are united in death and reborn with a collective identity. Together they renew their commitment to the mercy of the Virgin, and their collective vows, as can be seen in the following paragraph taken from one of their pamphlets entitled "Pilgrimage with Our Lady":

"A pilgrim you were in the road to the Calvary, a pilgrim of pain and of martyrdom, feeling in your own flesh all the weight of rejection and injustice. Teach us how to love serenely the mystery of Our Father's will."

On Sunday morning small groups of widows meet with a leader to discuss specific issues for the newly widowed, problems for the different age groups, and other topics of related interest. I went to the workshop for recent widows and as the meeting developed, the coordinator encouraged those present to talk about their own testimonies, and how they had solved their problems. One woman mentioned that her main problem was that she felt ashamed of not having a husband, a man in her life, as all her friends have. And her voice began to tremble until she was overcome by sobs and started to cry inconsolably. The leader comforted her in a sisterly way. She was very sympathetic and encouraged her to talk about her

sorrows and other feelings, which she did. It was a catharsis for everybody, and after that she looked as though she had been released from a heavy load.

MEV's pilgrimage can be interpreted, following Turner (1974), as a social drama and an initiation ritual where there is a display of the nature and intensity of relationships among participants. The following are some excerpts of the testimonies of widows regarding the meaning of their participation in this ritual taken from different issues of their newsletter:

"It is the moment of greatest unity and growth, where fraternal love is immense, and where there is consciousness of the bond that links us."
(*Esperança e Vida*, May 1992)

"I went to two local meetings and then MEV had a retreat in Fátima. I had a tremendous desire to go, but my financial situation was very bad and I couldn't go. A sister offered to pay for every thing, and I went!" (*Encontro*, March 1980)

"We should comment on the phenomenon of the Pilgrimage, not only because of its spectacular and emotional effect, but because it means a unity based on Faith and Love that is linking us all, and we go to testify that at the feet of Our Lady. It is also the occasion to verify the expansion of our movement, that it is not static, but as its name indicates it is an ascending path and it is faith."
(*Encontro*, March 1980)

The pilgrimage also becomes a metaphor for life. Natália told me that she thinks constantly about the day she would depart this world. "We are pilgrims in this life, and we have to be prepared. People think that we are only praying in here, but there is no need to become a widow in order to pray and be prepared."

d. The Training Courses

The training courses sponsored by MEV include general meetings where experts with different specialties come to lecture. Only the coordinators from local centers attend. Each course has a topic or major theme. In 1992 the theme was "Christian Charity and Human Solidarity." In the following year it was "Portuguese Women in the Coming of the Year 2000." The president of the CIDM gave a talk on the European Community, the family and women who are widowed. This presentation created the framework for an excellent discussion, trying to supply information in simple terms about the EEC and the impact that it can have on the widows' lives. Urban women seemed to be less informed than rural women, who were already feeling the effects of the agricultural policies established by the EEC.

Another topic was the function of the grandmother in today's society. On Sunday morning, a priest gave a lecture on "The Role of Portuguese Women in the Church of Tomorrow." This intervention stirred a lot of curiosity because of the imminent entrance of women as officers in the Anglican Church. MEV members were divided on this issue. For some it did not make any difference, but others would like to see women ordained as priests in Portugal. Other topics that had been debated in previous years were mentioned in MEV's newsletter - "The Mission of MEV in the New Evangelization," "MEV Here and Now," and "The Church in a Different World." The themes

discussed in the retreats follow more or less the same line: women's identity as widows in the church and the family; the hope and support they receive from the church and from one another; and their role as heads of households.

MEV members from the Responsible Teams do not consider themselves "professionals" but many keep abreast of the latest publications in the grief and bereavement literature, and participate in national and international conferences and seminars. Coincidentally, the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement met in March 1992 in Lisbon. MEV's president, D. Margaret Kendall de Villas-Boas, was the Portuguese coordinator. The presentations included people from a variety of disciplines and countries, including Phyllis Silverman from the "Widow to Widow" project of the United States.

2. Recruitment and Social Class

Although MEV is not strictly a working class organization neither is it a movement for the rich. Members are very attentive to situations of social injustice, to the point of sharing their personal property. MEV defines itself as a national Catholic organization, whose membership includes widows who want to support other women affected by the same affliction, in particular the newly widowed. Although their mission is to give spiritual guidance, they are expected to be aware of those who are suffering material hardship. In fact,

members are constantly involved in doing charitable and volunteer work. In their efforts to fight for what is rightfully theirs, MEV's newsletter often publishes actions taken to correct unfair situations that affect widows. For example, the March issue of 1993 had a section about pensions: "We gave a list with the names of 66 widows, MEV members who do not receive any survivors' pensions, to the Labor and Social Security Administration." They also commented on the response they got from the secretary showing how steps were being taken to ameliorate the condition. The embarrassing poverty in which many widows live is a regular theme in the newsletter. In 1986 many widows were left without a rent subsidy because of lack of knowledge about a recent legislative change. MEV urges women to put leases in their names immediately after their husbands' deaths because the law⁴ gives only 180 days to do so. Otherwise they risk losing their housing.

All twenty-seven MEV members interviewed responded to specific questions regarding the history of their participation in the movement -- how they became involved, and the meaning of MEV for their lives.⁵ One of the questions was specifically related to religion. For most, MEV membership did not mean a change in terms of their religious participation. Many had already been actively involved in religious groups

4 No. 4, art. IV of the Civil Code.

5 See questionnaire in appendix.

such as the Daughters of Maria, the Vicentinas, evangelization movements, and other Catholic charitable organizations. A few had joined convents as secular members with the prospect of moving into them permanently when they become too weak to stay alone in their own homes. They said that with more free time from household chores they can fully participate in MEV's activities. The way they usually joined MEV was through a friend or neighbor, or they heard about it in mass, or directly from a priest. Some actually knew about MEV when their husbands were still alive because they had a relative or a friend who was a member. Or, as in the case of Helena who explained how joining MEV had made a great difference in her life, recruitment came through a friend.

"I was on the verge of committing suicide when a friend told me to come to this movement. They saved my life."

"One day I was in the church crying at the feet of Our Lady, and I saw this woman who spoke to me about her own experience. She brought me into the movement. We are left without the support, protection and security given by our husbands. We have to struggle, and try to survive, but we have to like ourselves first." (Idalina)

Entering the movement was often described as a strong emotional experience. Judite, a petite vivacious woman of 82, recounted the following after a deep sigh and a small silence, trying not to fall apart:

"My biggest difficulty in life was his death, we were married more than fifty years. Sixty-two if he were alive. He wasn't a man, he was a saint. One day I went to church and I heard the priest mention a meeting for widows. But I didn't pay much attention. He died in October, and in January I was

alone at home. I have this little room at home, and I have a table and his photograph is there with a crucifix, and other little things, and I knelt down crying. 'Oh Manuel, help me, I can't take it anymore, I can't.' And I cried, and cried for a long time. And, I said to myself, this can't go on like this. I have the impression that he was listening to me, and I heard him telling me: 'So, didn't you hear on Sunday that there was a meeting for widows?' And I came to the meetings, but I was afraid, and realized how I was secluded, crying at home. I just went out on that day without changing my clothes or checking if I was well groomed. I didn't know where I was going, and I saw one widow, but she was walking fast, and then another widow, and I said, please, where is... It wasn't necessary to say more, because she knew where I was going. When we got there, she said to the coordinator: 'Here, I am bringing this woman in this shape,' and I don't know what happened to me. I saw them all talking to me and touching me, and as they spoke I cried more and more, until I was crying because I was receiving all this affection, and so that is why am here. But when my daughter became a widow, she still had one school age son, I gave her some of our publications, but she doesn't like to go to church, and she said that she didn't have the time, so it's all right."

Augusta had a different experience that led her to emphasize another aspect of MEV -- as a source of distraction instead of moral solidarity.

"My neighbor invited me, she told me that it was going to be a distraction, and spoke about the trips. She opened the way. The movement will continue if there are people with skills, active and dynamic people. Some people think that this is a sad movement."

Assunção has been a long term participant and here is what she said about MEV:

"I was 33 years old when I entered MEV in 1970 in Luanda, the same year that my husband died. It was through a friend and long term MEV affiliate. Then I have moved to positions of greater responsibility. All MEV activities are part of my daily routine. In terms of religion what I see is a

deepening and clarification of the knowledge I had. The only thing I can say about MEV is thanks for all I have gained. We don't have more members because propaganda and dissemination are not really part of MEV's objectives."

The reason why other widows do not join is also intriguing. I asked non-affiliated widows whether they had any knowledge of organizations for the bereaved. Usually they did not, but wanted to have information, and expressed a desire to join. At least one signed up with MEV after I gave her a copy of the booklet "Widowhood." Some expressed the lack of need to participate, as they thought that it was only for those who had problems. Others mentioned that they were not religious enough to participate in the rituals, and were not ready for a strong church participation.

Although many people, including widows, do not know about the existence of MEV, some who do have formed stereotypes of the organization. A number of MEV members mentioned that on some occasions when they had invited other widows to enter the movement they received responses such as:

- " I am not considering remarriage!" or, " My husband always told me that all they did was partying." But, Inocência told me that she always answered that: "No, this is not a party, there is nothing wrong in the meetings!" Others highlight the fact that widows in general need some distraction in their lives, and present this as a positive side of MEV.

3. Group Empowerment

This examination of the collective picture of widowhood emphasizes the potential and actual activism that MEV has as a social movement. MEV is first and foremost an organization of women, and as such, must be examined in the context of gender theory. This study follows the work of scholars such as Abu Lughod (1993, 1990), Lamphere (1987), and Almeida (1985) who approach women as strategists and political actors, forging tactics and behaviors to cope with a variety of problems in the face of change. This body of research demonstrates how gender ideologies and hierarchies structure women's roles in the political and economic arenas.

Mourning rituals become from this perspective instruments of empowerment and resistance. Seremetakis (1991) has already identified them as such in areas of Greece, arguing that they can "shatter the normative aspects of everyday life." As transformative ceremonies, they are grounded in powerful forces such as pain. This is also the case for Portuguese widows, above all for those who belong to MEV.

In this sense MEV can be more than an organization for the bereaved; indeed it may be regarded as an emergent social movement. Participation in the movement is a political action, understood as the collective mobilization of a group to challenge the traditional mourning behavior expected from widows as well as the treatment accorded to them by society. Widows in MEV also teach themselves how to live independently,

attenuating the emotional, economical and physical scars left by the death of their husbands.

Membership in MEV represents a specific act of resistance that appears to serve as an empowering mechanism. Members act together in a collective struggle to modify the conditions of their own lives. Using the means they have as widows, members are attempting to transform the status quo. Although many other non-affiliated widows also challenge mourning customs on their own initiative or under pressure from younger family members, they have a different sense of usefulness and accomplishment in their lives. They are not involved in helping other people change their ideas about the ideological or material conditions in which they live. Many poor and older widows face social death, making it very hard for them to achieve autonomy and assertiveness, or to empower themselves as the result of sharing a common fate.

The participation of working class women in community organization has seldom been the focus of analysis by academics or the media. The political activism of women was until recently a forgotten chapter in the literature on social movements. As Susser (1988) has suggested, accounts of poor women usually portray them as passive victims living in a world of hopelessness. Working class women are constantly described as unskilled, politically disinterested and ineffectual (Bookman and Morgen 1988). New theoretical approaches see struggling working class women and women in

general as agents of social change, defending and demanding what they consider rightfully theirs. This action materializes in a multiplicity of strategies that do not always result in widespread social change. Given the systematic exclusion of women from traditional political spaces, they often resort to other avenues for taking part in political processes which sometimes result in participation in rebellious acts.

In analyzing a textile strike organized by women in Barcelona in the 1920s Kaplan suggests that women do not necessarily want to change the gender system, the established social order or the sexual division of labor. She concluded that in order "to understand female consciousness in the popular classes one must comprehend the degree to which working-class women uphold the sexual division of labor because it defines what women do and therefore provides a sense of who they are in society and culture" (Kaplan 1982:565). Therefore what women do as part of their everyday lives becomes part of the political process, sometimes taking on revolutionary proportions.

In Portugal, the work of Riegelhaupt (1967) has already indicated how, during the *Estado Novo*, peasant women living in the outskirts of Lisbon manipulated both the political and economic institutions, constituting a "parallel structure" with respect to the formal institutions of the national society. At a time when the country had few possibilities for female participation except those related to maternity and

domestic activities, Riegelhaupt showed that the women of São João das Lampas performed an impressive role in decision making and political activism. In many cases women utilized informal political and economic roles because they had access to certain types of information, coupled with their sometimes privileged position in communication networks. As is the case in many places, women use gender models to give meaning to their political participation.

MEV members take up many other social causes and are involved with progressive issues such as the protection of the environment. MEV sponsored a campaign against the use of plastic shopping bags and chemicals used in the printing industry to give a glossy texture to magazine covers. They sent letters to the weekly journal *Expresso* asking that they use recycled paper bags instead of plastic bags to sell the paper in. "As Portuguese women, we feel that it is our duty and responsibility to fight for a less deteriorated Portugal, cleaner, healthier. We need to save the environment!" (*Esperança e Vida*, Nov 1992)

Empowerment as defined by Bookman and Morgen (1988) is not an act of individual resistance but a process of political mobilization that challenges the basic power relations in society. Following West and Blumberg (1990), I argue that MEV must be seen as a social movement of women who are trying to extend their nurturing roles into the public sphere. Through their participation in this community of widows those who are

at an economic disadvantage or risk also try to ensure their own independent survival, as they acquire skills and assistance obtaining access to resources.

The flourishing of MEV after the 1970s has a lot to do with the political climate of the whole country, and the increasing participation of women in formal political life. The participation of widows in this collective action has had several consequences. One is that MEV has given many powerless women a voice and the possibility to access certain resources previously denied to them -- for example, free legal advice and knowledge regarding common problems that widows encounter. Ordinary women with little formal education have become leaders and transmitters of knowledge, thus altering the nature and distribution of power. Many are also confronting sons, brothers and other family members in their struggle to assert themselves. Another important consequence for women is the bereavement support they receive and give to each other.

4. Who Participates in MEV?

The question of "who participates" has continuously puzzled researchers in the area of bereavement care (Lund and Caserta 1992). This is an important question in terms of the discussion on the effectiveness of bereavement groups as it has been assumed that most participants are people who are depressed, isolated and disabled by their grief, and that

those who are suffering from distress are the ones who tend to join.

I suggest that in the case of Portugal, widows join because they find something beyond psychological help. Any Portuguese woman, rich or poor, from a small town or from a city, old or young, can be a member of MEV. There are members from India, Brazil and Spain, and a few Afro-Portuguese. The only requirement is to be a widow willing to participate actively in the movement, and to have a commitment to help other people. To be a fervent Catholic is not a prerequisite; as one coordinator told me "we don't ask for marriage certificates to check if they were married in the church." But, the fact is that the members have to commit themselves to intense religious participation. In addition to their missionary role they visit families during times of transition, and attend funerals praying for the dead. They visit the sick, the elderly, the lonely and the jailed; participate in literacy programs; and try to help people with drug, prostitution or other problems.

In the case of MEV, perhaps a more appropriate question than "who" joins would be "why" they join, and why they remain in the organization for such a long time. What are the perceived and actual benefits? Discussions of the efficacy of support groups also center around the length of time that people spend participating. In the case of MEV, many have been dynamic participants for more than twenty years,

particularly those who are in leading positions. It seems that once widows enter MEV and feel it meets their needs, they tend to commit themselves for life. The average length of participation was eight years with a maximum of 24 years. "Success" is measured in other bereavement groups as the time it takes for a participant to "graduate" from a program.

MEV loosely follows the model of the different stages of the grief process stressing the importance of understanding the feelings that accompany grief such as denial or anger. The therapeutic component is not the central part of the monthly meetings; rather, it is one of many aspects considered important. Solace, explanations, answers and thoughts are further sought in the teachings of the Catholic faith.

The movement is not seen as a temporary group where widows can reach a point where it is no longer necessary to participate. No timetables are set, and if members think that they may not need more support to get through their grief, they are there to help others. It is like a calling to help other recently widowed women and to do other charity deeds, as this testimony from Carmo affirms:

"My sister in law needed to be comforted. She was already involved with the sick in her parish...There is a path here, a sort of calling, a vocation. Many are actually emancipated from oppressive things. MEV is much better than what many people think."

In comparing MEV with other bereavement support groups one salient aspect is the suggested underutilization of bereavement support groups. Levy and Derby (1992) have argued

that the explanations for this situation in the United States include the assumption that some people do not experience serious visible distress after the death of a spouse or have adequate sources of social support. But the most important reason seems to be preconceptions about bereavement groups. Some fear that their grief will be exacerbated or that to join is a sign of weakness, meaning that they are not able to cope on their own. The researchers found that joiners tend to have higher levels of distress or suffer from more stressful events. Lieberman and Videka-Sherman (1986) found that in general, among the people who seek help or join support groups, the bereaved remain under represented.

Portuguese widows on the other hand do not participate in MEV because they feel that they need help with a specific problem, or because they think that they are not grieving properly. There are other factors that persuade Portuguese women to enter MEV, and establish a long term commitment of service to God and to other people in need of support. For example, MEV incorporates secular rituals into an already established religious ritual: the monthly masses for the soul of the deceased. In order to understand the significance and perhaps the consequences of this we should keep in mind the way bereavement groups function as an arena of secular rituals.

In addition to the religious aspects, there were other things that MEV members found helpful and positive. The most

constantly mentioned advantage was their participation in communal life. This side of MEV provided renewed vitality and feelings of strength and unity, and more important for them, "the courage to face life through the Grace of God." Living the everyday life together, and giving more of themselves to other people was mentioned as the source of improved self-esteem and self-fulfillment. They noted that sharing experiences helped them to "find consolation, receive moral support," obtain "advice, commiseration, comfort" and "encouragement." They felt "relieved of burdens, alleviated, soothed," and had "lifted spirits." They also appreciated the opportunity to develop friendships, and think more about other people and be less self-centered. One widow spoke assertively about her own personal benefits.

"They are good company, everything is very positive, I was so absorbed in my own problems, that I wasn't thinking about other people. My life became useful, and I am glad that at my age I still have some lucidity and the energy and desire to go out."

The development of friendships is another important component. Their participation was recommended as the best medicine to overcome the solitude and feel cherished and loved. A simple word of encouragement given at the right time is considered a blessing. Often MEV members moved toward expressions conveying the idea of a haven, a refuge from the agony of living with people who do not understand their feelings. A widow puts in her own words her sense of alienation: "From other people I received censorship, but they

understood me because we all have the same pain, we all speak the same language. Praise be to our Lord!" Life before MEV was described with feelings of being lost and disoriented, "full of suffering" and a "purgatory." Even though they received exceptional support some acknowledged that they still cry sometimes because the pain never ends completely.

The widows cited the learning experience in MEV as another positive aspect. In one case it was described as a "wonderful experience" of having dreams come true or, as in the case of the newsletter editor to become a journalist, her long life dream. Learning also means instruction on how to look for jobs or apply for pensions, in other words the acquisition of practical survival skills. For others, their participation has meant the discovery of skills and talents they did not know they had. One widow vivaciously mentioned that she was not looking specifically for "equilibrium," but that MEV gave her a perspective for her life, and she felt wiser and more knowledgeable. Understanding the state of widowhood, and learning to live as regular women without their mourning clothes, was another important thing. They said that they had to "learn to live again," and to learn to support themselves.

The training courses are also seen as important, because they are given by experts in different fields who know how to convey their messages to widows with dissimilar backgrounds. Psychologists, educators and other professionals help them to

deal with issues related to their children's education that sometimes create guilty feelings. One widow discussed the confusion she felt when her children were growing up, and how she transformed her self-blame into feelings of accomplishment.

"I had a number of problems with my children. One daughter attempted suicide twice before the age of fourteen, and one son ran away with a woman when he was about to marry another one, and the house they were building together was almost ready. I feel proud now that I have been able to be mother and father for them, and I successfully guided them through childhood and adolescence."

In their own evaluation, many MEV members were self critical of some of the things they saw as shortcomings in the movement as they answered a specific question related to the negative things or the things they did not like about the movement. In general, their positive experiences increases the desire to reach out to other people from their neighborhoods and to people who "are suffering from the same affliction." They are aware that with "better union, we can all make a better world." Here is a brief summary of the expectations of one widow about the future of the movement:

"The movement has grown in such a way that the meetings are getting bigger, and sometimes out of hand. I would like to see smaller groups, more individual contact. We need more militants, people who want a different kind of responsibility. With the new EEC programs, and the opening of the borders, we need a stronger line of action in terms of expansion and evangelization. We also need to defy the entrance of sects."

Some consider that there are fissures in MEV that may be the beginning of divisions. There are those who would like to

see the group have more autonomy in decision making as they see power conflicts with parish priests and the need to "take care of the human before achieving the divine." As in any group where people of different social classes get together, conflicts can arise, and a few widows felt that some members consider themselves wiser, self-sufficient and superior.

If widowhood has debilitating effects for MEV members, their participation in the movement actually means gaining strength. Losing a spouse may free women and men from unhappy marriages or from unequal relationships, but many women may not know what to do with their newly found freedom. There are some who seize the opportunity and flourish and others who just wither away. When Rosa's husband died, after being bedridden for eight years, she enjoyed the fact that for the first time in almost a decade, she did not have to rush home and take care of him. She never left him alone for more than three hours at a time, day and night. And even though her brother lived at home and she rented rooms to students she felt that the obligation to care for him around the clock was only hers. She would not consider hiring a nurse because it would be an additional expense, and second, she believed that no one would be able to do it better than she did. Six months after his death she took the first vacation she ever had in her life.

5. Symbols and Religious Discourses

The positive side of MEV as a religious experience is stressed constantly in collective activities. As mentioned earlier, many widows were already active members in the church. An important aspect of their participation in MEV was heightened faith, and a clarification and reaffirmation of their belief in God, an event that is seen as improving self-esteem and providing happiness. Before being widows many women, sometimes with their husbands, have been involved in different religious activities. They have been long term members of the catechism, and have participated in church sponsored conferences and workshops related to family issues. A fifty year old woman who had been a widow for eight years wrote the following letter to MEV's newsletter, expressing her feelings in this way:

"I have been very sick since my husband died. I spend my life at the doctor's office, and life stopped being interesting for me. Sometimes I am even angry with my son. Four months ago at the bus stop I met a woman who upon seeing me so sad and with two wedding rings asked me if I was a widow. I told her my sorrow, lamented my misfortune and cried. This sister spoke to me about the Movement, and we went together to my first meeting. I loved it, and felt animated. Only one thing made me feel sad, I could not participate in Communion because I had not confessed in many years."

Below, I mention the religious experience of Adelaide, her entrance into MEV, and her efforts to actively disseminate the ideals of the group.

"We always prayed and recited the Holy Rosary every night since our wedding night. On that day we knelt together and prayed before consummating our

marriage. He died in 1974. I knew about MEV when he was still alive, in the hospital, receiving dialysis. I read the book Walking Under the Path of Faith, and later on I went to the Algarve and I found other widows there. Then, I heard about the National Pilgrimage, I went and made contacts to create MEV in my hometown in the North and received a lot of help from a priest. There were 80 widows in our first meeting. It was difficult at first because many were afraid, and fearful of the responsibility, of being alone, or of being robbed on the streets. I had a strong religious background. The MEV ideal is to give oneself to other people, I know a recent widow who is very down, and I am going to bring her to Fátima."

Priests function clearly as authority figures, guides, confessors, teachers and friends. Often they recommended widows to enter MEV, as in the cases of Aurora and Beatriz.

"I entered MEV approximately 15 years ago. There was a priest in my parish who told me that I had to make myself useful because I don't have any children. He gave me lots of advice. He died already, but my life changed because I used to spend my days at home alone."

"I came to MEV following the recommendations of a priest who was my daughter's teacher. That was about six years ago. Increasingly I took on more responsibility until I became a Regional coordinator. My religious life turned deeper, and my knowledge is more concrete. We need more people willing to take more responsibilities. We also need more individual contact and smaller meetings, so we will know each other better."

The priest's discourse regarding widowhood may manifest some contradictions both in terms of the autonomy of the group and in the manipulation of traditional gender and family roles and ideology mixed with progressive affirmations. The idea that women are the "angels of the household" is constantly reinforced, as is the "ideology of suffering." Priests consistently stress the notion that "suffering is very

valuable before the eyes of God," or "blessed are those who suffer." The idea of Christian love and forgiveness are also steadily mentioned, but in this case the twist given has to do with forgiving the husband's domestic sins such as bad temper, infidelities and other offenses, in some cases blaming the wives for such behavior.

"Remember to pay attention to your personal aspect as well as your dignity and discretion. You have to be proper and have a less worldly perspective of life. Remember that husbands go to the secretary because she is made up and well dressed. Now, don't think that because your husbands are dead you don't need to take care of yourselves."

Once a year new MEV members are invited to participate in a ritual called "Initiation to the Spirituality of Widowhood." Here we can appreciate better the role of the priests in defining what it means to be married and widowed in the Portuguese Catholic tradition. There were 94 widows present, not counting the seven or so who were organizing. This day long retreat is divided in three parts. In the morning there are lectures given by a priest, at noon there is a communal lunch, and in the afternoon the floor is open for the presentation of personal testimonies, with suggestions on how to go about solving problems. At the end it is hoped that participants will go home with a better capacity to face life.

During one lecture a Father spelled out the acronym MEV as "Movement for the Emancipation of Widows" (*Movimento de Emancipação das Viúvas*) provoking laughs and giggles from the crowd. This same Father stressed in his speech the role of

widows in Portuguese society, while recommending to follow Our Lady.

"...the Scriptures do not say it, but when Our Lady was completely alone, she proceeded to look after the church. Widow is a word that comes from the latin and means 'void of a presence,' yet she continues to be alive, and life continues to have meaning for her. A widow before being a widow is a woman first. A woman who continues to have duties that she can not resign. For many it is very painful because they depended completely on the husband. Now she has to take in her hands the reins of her own life... Remember that you were women before being wives, and you need to have the ability to understand the solitude of others. Of those who are abandoned by their husbands, and other lonely people such as spinsters."

The priests' political inclinations and personal views about international events are sometimes mixed in the discourse. They gave their versions of what happened in the division of the Soviet Union, or what position to take in the armed conflicts of the Portuguese speaking nations. But this is exclusive to MEV meetings.

MEV both challenges and accommodates traditional gender expectations. While they do not seek to change the established social order widows want to assert themselves and they find that the best thing to do is follow the teachings of the church. There are those who would like the group to have more autonomy from the priests in decision-making. Some priests are not interested in opening centers in their parishes, and it is also difficult to find women who want to become part of the responsible teams. Others would like to see MEV with a clearer plan for social action.

While it seems that widows agreed with everything that the priests say, they resist in subtle and open ways. The widows in one center were very annoyed when a priest who was temporarily substituting for their regular Father kept calling them "brothers" instead of the more appropriate "sisters" since he was the only man present in the room. It seemed as if he was undermining their efforts to be recognized as self-reliant women independent of men. Others complained to me that their priests sometimes treated them like children, and they were upset because priests did not give them enough credit for what they did or say. Sometimes, I heard the priests talk to widows about marriage as if their husbands were still alive, and as if they were still in a marital relationship. Indeed, at times, it seemed as if they were.

The members discussed and criticized the priest's sermons among themselves, and if they liked him they paid him well and gave him expensive gifts. One received a fine liturgical robe for his birthday, and he liked it so much that he wants to be buried in it. Overall, the priests gave advice, following MEV's statutes and principles on how to be useful to society, where to look for help in a crisis, and how to better themselves. There is a long tradition of anticlericalism in Portugal as part of a movement to criticize the national church for being too influential in political affairs (Brettell 1990). Likewise, it should be kept in mind, as Riegelhaupt (1964) has already noted, that religiosity is

expressed in different ways in the contrasting regions of Portugal.

6. Conclusion

I have discussed here the main principles of MEV, and the meanings that members find in their participation in the movement. With the historical development of MEV, and the personal testimonies it was possible to elucidate both the empowering experience of the group and the benefits obtained in terms of bereavement support. Culture and religion also play important roles here. Religion, in the way that it is preached by Portuguese priests, plays a contradictory role insofar as it is a controlling, authoritarian institution. Priests reinforce traditional roles for women as suffering mothers and wives at the same time that MEV tries to challenge them. Issues of accommodation and resistance are very complex and sometimes difficult to unravel because of the contradictory role of religion. Yet, Catholic faith offers a special component in reaffirming their culturally defined identity as widows while providing hope, courage and consolation. Religion proposes a solution to problems confronting aging women who need guidance and support in how to live alone. Some of the actions of MEV members contest the traditional mourning practices that oppress women, but simultaneously reproduce gender inequality as they continue to project the model of widows as passive, suffering and

accepting the burden that marriage has eternally placed on them.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR WIDOWS

In January 1995, I received a letter from Portugal which was a response to a Christmas card that I had sent in December. It translates as follows:

Our good little friend Patricia,

In my name and the names of all the ladies in our Center, we thank you for your holiday wishes. In return we wish for you and your husband the greatest blessings from the Sacred Heart of Jesus and from God. This past year our Center was struck with hard losses of friends who died. Right now there are four who are very sick without being able to go out, and four more were taken to homes for the aged. When are you coming back to visit us? Best regards from all, and hugs for you and your husband.

Your friend always, Joaquina.

This small letter stirred in me a number of feelings about my relationship with my "informants" and the fieldwork in general. The lives of these Portuguese widows have touched me deeply. I admire them for their courage, their resistance, their resilience and their fierce struggle to continue in the face of adversity. I also miss them because I have come to know them intimately; they became my close friends and confidants, and we prayed, cried and laughed together.

Thinking about those who died, I feel that a whole generation of people is slowly vanishing. They are the ones who grew up in Salazar's times and lived in a socio-political and economic situation very different from the one that most younger women experience now. No one would doubt that

Portuguese women enjoy a better situation than they had twenty years ago. They have witnessed a transformation in many aspects of society that has been made possible through the combined efforts of the socialist government, the EEC and women's organizations.

This study has portrayed the situation and struggles of urban widows from different social classes. This was accomplished by examining the variation in their standard of living, the possibility of remarriage, the availability of supports and how they are mediated through networks of family and friends, the impact of various social and economic policies and widows' own active involvement in improving their lives.

Although widowhood can strike at any moment, Lisbon women are better prepared to cope with the consequences both financially and emotionally. Not only are there good support structures, though not in all neighborhoods, but they now have the option to join MEV. The problem is to connect lonely and isolated widows with organizations that can help them. Increasingly, widowhood is a problem in which the elderly are over-represented. They are a vulnerable population with special needs, yet they manage to retain the power to live their lives independently.

The importance of considering the social context in which death rituals take place is clearly seen in the case of Portugal. Major themes such as marital residence, inheritance,

gender structures and the position of women give shape to the performance of a sequence of responsibilities related to death. A widow has the duty to pay for the burial, funeral banquet, masses, exhumation and to take care of her husband's soul in exchange for his contributions to the household, a share of the inheritance and more recently a pension. This duty is a continuation of her obligations to care for him when he was alive, performing a number of tasks such as keeping a clean house (in death he will have a clean grave) and providing nourishment (his soul receives weekly spiritual food in the manner of graveside prayers and monthly masses). It is not a coincidence that often funerary monuments look like miniature houses.¹

This official responsibility imposed on widows has an additional aspect related to religious ideology regarding marriage. The symbolism of the death rituals reinforces the idea that death does not separate husbands and wives, and marriage does not end with the death of the husband. Although legally a widow is free to remarry, after a certain period of time, the tendency is not to do so. Funerary rituals play an important role reinforcing this ideology. In the case of permanent resting places often couples are buried in the same *jazigo*, or taken to adjacent ossuaries. Women who marry widowers have to consult his children and other family members

1 In Greece, Danforth sees a further connection between home and grave in the marking of the tombs with the words home or house and then the family name of the deceased (1986: 58).

when it comes to decisions about funeral arrangements which sometimes include burying him with his first wife.

Demographic patterns need to be considered in connection to the social relationships involved in the care of the dead. Since Portuguese women tend to outlive their husbands, widows rely mainly on their daughters for their afterlife care through contracts created by inheritance patterns. However, this obligation is often minimized by a widow's preparation for her own death. When a man loses his wife he is almost free of ritual obligations, except for few minor mourning signs such as a black tie that he promptly removes, while daughters often behave "like widows" when their own mothers die.

The way that patterns of social relationships come into play at the time of a person's death has been studied by Danforth (1982) in areas of Greece. In Greek cemeteries, the graves of married men and women are differentiated by the amount of care and decorations they receive. In rituals similar to those of Portuguese widows, Greek women visit their dead daily, wash and scrub the graves, bring flowers and buy expensive decorations. Since their inheritance system has a preference for the youngest son, the obligations to care for married women's graves is left to daughters-in-law. The performance of death rituals does not receive the same attention as a result of the eternal conflict between the mother and the wives of her sons.

As in many places, death rituals in Portugal are public

performances that are carefully evaluated by the community and determine the level of status that a family has. In the past, inadequate performances were censored through a number of sanctions, from gossip in minor cases to the removal of the children. These performances continue to link the deceased with the living but may place a heavy financial and emotional burden on women. If a woman is unable to fulfill any of her ritual obligations because she can not afford it, she may feel guilty that her husband is not resting in peace because she failed to fulfill the sacred obligations. In other words, she failed to be a good wife.

The death of the husband is a wound to the identity and position of women in society. Seremetakis (1991) pointed out that given the subordinate position of women in Greek society, it is only at funerals and cemeteries that they can express their resistance to everyday limiting social contexts. Thus, the relationship between woman and death becomes clear as the woman is forced to maintain the social relationships and the identity she acquired through the deceased.

Good Catholic widows, particularly those who are older, are always prepared for their imminent mortality. They are familiarized with the reality of death by their husbands' death. In fact, many who thought they were going to die with their husbands gave away their things, "organized" their worldly affairs and sat at home to wait for death to come. Many widows, regardless of their participation in MEV, attend

mass regularly and receive the "sacrament of the sick" which replaces the former Sacrament of "extreme unction" now routinely given to the elderly and the sick on certain occasions.

Religion plays a number of roles in the lives of widows. First among these is that religion acts as a balm to soothe the emotional scars left by death. However, this creates an apparent contradiction because it redefines the identity of widows in light of the traditional mourning rituals and customs while reinforcing the "eternal marriage ideology" and the religious obligation of widows as keepers of their husbands' souls and memories. This obligation is shaped by rigid death customs which often serve as another vehicle of social control. Efforts to break away from the custom of visiting cemeteries, tending graves and wearing black may be seen as a desire on the part of the widow to redefine her identity. For many, this is an act of resistance, a struggle to leave the margins of society and to be seen in a more positive way, rather than as an inauspicious woman who has been in contact with death, or as a person who inspires feelings of disgust or elicits only pity and compassion.

Religion offers additional comfort and hope in resurrection. This presents a paradox to widows who have to keep the memory of the husband alive while accepting the finality of death. MEV comes into play at a moment when women's roles are being redefined, when women are striving to

attain an identity as an individual and can look for fulfillment in other areas of social life. Playing out this apparent contradiction but without defying religion, MEV encourages a shorter mourning process based on an acceptance of the finality of death, the management of the emotions and the search for a new identity serving the living. Whereas in the past a widow had positive feelings as a result of tending her husband's grave, and did not regret the expenses of this duty, today Portuguese women increasingly see this as a problem. Younger women associate lengthy and traditional mourning with emotional wounds that continue to bleed, reinforcing feelings of despair, hindering the reincorporation of women in society and the construction of a new social reality. Lavish funerals and expensive rituals are increasingly seen as a waste of money. In the case of MEV, the presence of the deceased diminishes while the contact with women in the same situation creates a powerful bond. MEV and other "modern" widows do not need dramatic wailing rituals or elaborate laments to vent their feelings; they have what they see as equally valid avenues for cathartic expressions. Similarly, mourning moves from being a public spectacle into the private realm in which emotions are shared only with close relatives and friends.

With cremation, accepted by the Catholic church and encouraged by cemeteries and funeral homes administrators, it is easier and faster to accept the finality of death. Women

are freed from their obligation to exhume the body, a ritual that is quickly disappearing, as it is seen as too macabre, and as part of the general shift in attitudes and religious perspectives toward death.

Having been released from this duty, widows may find other positive aspects in their new status. However, that is determined by their position in society. Class, age and social programs are important factors that will shape the decisions of widows and the way they will be reincorporated in society. Younger widows may find the idea of remarriage attractive. They may be able to afford to relinquish survivors' pensions in the event of a new marriage since they may have better paying jobs. Poor widows with children can benefit from a number of social privileges totally inexistent more than twenty years ago. Similarly, pensions given to elderly widows offer the possibility to enjoy more independence from family members who were supporting them. Likewise, family members are relieved from the burden of caring and providing for the elderly.

1. "Lights to Illuminate the Path of the Widows"

The success of MEV as a group has much to do with the way it defines itself. As a social movement, MEV is more than a therapeutic or self-help group. In addition to improving their own situation, the widows in MEV have as their main mission to help others. The impact of MEV is recognized as very helpful

by therapists and priests who send their patients and parishioners to join the movement. In terms of mental health, the members themselves recognize the value of the association. MEV goes beyond the concept of a self help group and enters the domain of a religious ritual that empowers women. Participation in the movement is a socially accepted avenue for women who want to leave their isolation and the control of their families and neighbors. Moreover, it gives new meanings to their lives as women, as elders, and as widows as they get involved in a number of voluntary occupations in hospitals, senior centers and other settings. Many women who join the organization become close friends for life, while others join because their friends are already in MEV. Once they enter the movement, widows tend to stay there for the rest of their lives. Those who are not seeing any benefits or who are not interested in MEV's activities usually drop out after the initial meetings.

MEV members have offered a number of suggestions and recommendations and other "guiding lights" that have been useful for them in pulling their lives together. Former MEV director Mrs. Margaret Kendall has published a list of important directions for widows. This advice includes acceptance of the finality of death, not keeping the sorrow inside, sharing feelings with people who are going through the same pain, paying attention to health, avoiding despair and looking for encouragement, transforming grief into creative

energy, filling the emotional void with contact with other people, struggling to solve financial needs, finding respect and freedom in the family while continuing to have obligations and duties with family members and looking for professional help in case of need.

For widows who have difficulty contesting tradition, there are more problems of isolation and lack of motivation to reintegrate in society. Middle class women who belong to MEV have been exposed to other experiences generally find less difficulty in this transition. It is not surprising that they also stop wearing mourning clothes sooner. It is interesting to note a reversal of class roles vis-à-vis the "traditional" mourning system. In the past, upper and middle class women wore strict mourning clothes and followed rules more carefully. Now, middle class women remove their mourning clothes sooner and encourage others not to wear black, while lower class women have more difficulty in abandoning tradition.

2. Who Will Take Care of Me Now?

All widows aspire to being "independent." This does not mean that they want to be "on their own," or to live alone. Nor does it mean that they want to be powerful domineering women in total control of the family affairs. What they want is to be able to pass on the control of their homes to a trustworthy member of the younger generation, and that when

the time comes, this person in return will fulfill their obligations by taking care of them until the end. For this reason, and because they worked very hard at being a part of a web of relationships, they feel betrayed and abandoned if placed in homes for the aged. As old age approaches they expect to have consolidated their network of family and friends who can provide physical assistance and emotional support so they can have a comfortable and satisfying old age. For this reason the majority of widows anticipate spending their last days in their own homes, surrounded by their caring family. The notion of being "burdens" or dependent is beginning to take hold because the number of available children has decreased and the number of childless widows is growing. The fact that children are more educated than their parents decreases the value of elderly women as wise transmitters of knowledge. Likewise, their economic contributions are lower compared with the salaries of their children. A widow who remains in her home gradually retires from housework, contributing only with minor chores, and her responsibility as a child care provider also declines.

Neither the widow nor the community see economic and emotional dependency as a negative thing, and she often feels blessed to have a kind devoted family caring for her. A widow will arouse pity if she has no family, or a family that does not help her out. People still remember that the only option for many widows in the past was to live on public charity.

Only once did I see a widow begging in the metro. All dressed in black, she immediately stirred the compassion of passengers who promptly reached into their pockets for money. However, we should keep in mind that often younger women are burdened with the care and support of their elderly family members. Traditional female networks that were created as survival strategies may be eroded by women's participation in the labor force as well as widows' ability to subsist on their own with their salaries and retirement pensions. Institutional care or state sponsored home care may come to replace these webs of female relationships. Anxiety about living alone and about the future is more present when there are no children, and uncertainty looms as their traditional values crumble.

MEV members in particular are savvy in the usage of available resources for the elderly. Many are enrolled in the University for the Third Age,² an institution affiliated with the church which was founded in 1977 with the specific purpose of culturally serving the elderly. They have non-degree programs, and students attend for the sheer pleasure of acquiring more knowledge. Courses are flexible and varied, depending sometimes on the availability of teachers who are volunteers. Students consider it an excellent way to use up free time and meet other people, and their last opportunity to study the language or the craft that they always dreamed to learn.

2 Universidade para a Terceira Idade

3. Navigating the Intersection of Class, Gender and Kinship

Until recently, the literature on gender roles in Southern Europe extensively emphasized the submission of women and explained gender relations in terms of ideals of chastity for women on the one hand, and authority for men on the other, using the honor and shame model (Saunders 1981, Peristiany 1965, Gilmore 1987, Davis 1977, Cutileiro 1971). Renewed interest in gender issues has prompted a number of studies to challenge these notions of women as powerless creatures confined to the private domains while men are dominant in public spaces. These studies have attempted to avoid depicting women as the victims of a rigid structure, document the participation of women in public life and give more attention to women's active role in the social processes that affect their lives (Brettell 1991, Pina Cabral 1986, Collier 1986).

To illustrate how gender systems are played out in Portugal, Cole (1991) conducted a study of fisherwomen in a northern coastal community, concluding that in this area women cannot be defined in terms of male prestige systems or in terms of their sexuality. The effectiveness of the honor and shame system in describing gender in other parts of southern Europe was thus called into question. Cole suggested that other types of social control were more effective than the control of women's sexuality in regulating women's economic production and social standing. Following this line of thought, this found widows to be women resigned to their fate

but individuals struggling to be recognized as full citizens, both manipulating and accommodating the traditions that have been imposed on them. I explored the social meaning and the actual dynamics of women's power and prestige from the perspective of widows as individual actors enmeshed in a variety of social relationships both in their homes and outside. Silverman (1975) suggested that the various roles of women are best elucidated by looking specifically at life crises, an approach that Hareven (1978) also advocated for the study of family, and a focus which was particularly appropriate in this context.

As Collier and Yanagisako (1987) have pointed out, the analytic separation of the arenas of gender and kinship has long hindered studies of the family. As a result of the use of concepts of kinship derived from the functionalist perspective of the 1940s and 1950s, anthropological studies have focused almost entirely on how conjugal relationships and widow remarriage contribute to the maintenance of the social system, disregarding the varied and multiple roles and statuses of widows. Other studies of the family and the household have also overlooked the situation of widows.

Scholars must look very carefully at the conditions that influence the formation of single-headed homes, and the factors that make these families become a significant proportion of households. Similarly, an assessment of the changes in kinship systems and networks which in turn affect

the organization of production and the disintegration of extended families has to be considered. The next century will begin with a growing number of families headed by one parent. They should not be seen as automatically dysfunctional but as another type of family organized according to class, ethnicity, household composition and as part of the broader social system. Their problems, resources, and the way these families deal with their day to day existence must be examined in relation to general programs for women, children, poverty and families in general. Other issues that must be considered include historical analyses of family and household formation, and why certain families have only one parent in charge. Questions concerning the absence of men and why they die earlier than women must be analyzed thoroughly. These issues have profound implications for public policy, which often considers widows as a homogeneous group distinct from the rest of society.

Research in this area seems at times contradictory because of lack of clarity in the use of concepts. For this reason, it is fundamental to identify the household composition and size, the social context, parent's marital status, the type of societal resources available to women, their income, as well as other characteristics that constitute the socio-economic conditions and provide information on the range of variation that exists within the category of single headship. Knowledge of these differences can be helpful in

determining the relationships between the absence of the father and poverty as well as other problems, and in examining more accurately the links between individuals, households and society.

A survivor's pension is often the key that opens the way to self-reliance, away from dependency from family members. In Portugal only after 1974 widows were considered worthy of state assistance. In fact, many countries do not have universal insurance schemes for widows. The age of the widow, the age and number of children, her work status, residential arrangements and her moral behavior often determine if she is eligible for public economic support. Blom (1991) has suggested that public involvement maintaining widows violated the "ideology of domesticity" and the masculine identity that required a man as the breadwinner. As the dual-earning family grew in importance widows became the focus of attention by governments. Perceptions of need had changed to the extent that some countries, such as Portugal, in certain cases, give survivors, pensions to widowers and to other dependents such as the parents of the deceased.

Decisions taken at the government level must be studied carefully in terms of such implications because they affect women in a particular way, either exploiting them or forcing them to enter or leave the work force based on ideological demands that are rooted on state-defined ideals of femaleness. The intersections of class, gender and age systems have to be

carefully taken into account in the analysis of single parent households, as well as in the integration of these households into local, national and international economic and political structures. The situation of widows in a given society is directly connected to other forms of female oppression, and related to the quality of life of all women.

Previously, I discussed the manner in which widowhood had been approached by focussing on independent themes rather than interconnections with other important issues related to the death of the husband. This study is a departure from those approaches. I have tried to integrate the psychological perspective, the household approach and its relation to the welfare state as well as the cultural aspects of widowhood. Most studies have given attention to bereavement issues without attending to the economic, cultural and political aspects of widowhood, and how widows are immersed in important relationships inside and outside the household. In fact, widows in Portugal develop networks that shrink or expand according to both internal and external forces. These forces depend on local, national and international government policies, distribution of resources and other factors that affect widows directly. For instance, a pension means the difference between destitution and dignity, it affects the decision to remarry, to move out of the home, and to live an independent life.

Widows have organized around a number of symbols

representing aspects of their experience as women cast in a contradictory position. They are often seen by the church, family and neighbors as incomplete individuals who are expected to live in the shadow of their deceased husbands, honoring them and keeping their memories alive. Paradoxically, widows use that same perception to empower themselves and obtain a sense of fulfillment in their personal lives. In their effort to assert themselves they redefine gender and marriage. One lesson that can be drawn from MEV is that their activism has been able to become a movement of social reform only through their accommodation to religious discourses. They are, however, constrained in their efforts by a number of forces that cannot always be escaped, such as inheritance rules and government legislation.

It appears that data collected on Portuguese widows challenge many of the generalizations about women raising families alone. In this case single headship cannot be equated with poverty; nor does the problem lie in the need for women to be both mother and father. Rather, the critical issue lies in women's self-definition as incomplete because their husbands are not alive. The finality of death helps to create an image of a father or a husband whose bad attributes slowly disappear with age while the good qualities are embellished. By contrast, the image of a father or husband absent by divorce or desertion may not experience this transformation. Death is forever, and what is left of him are memories,

photographs and a place in the cemetery. He may also leave property, not always significant, but what is more noticeable is his shadow, his immaterial presence lingering over the household. Widows have the tendency to idealize the nuclear family, as she muses that she would have probably had fewer problems with their children if her husband were alive.

Beyond this, the dead man becomes in many cases a protective, mythical, perfect and wise masculine figure enshrined in the widow's home and heart. Sometimes this undermines the widow's own self-esteem, assertiveness and recognition of her own accomplishments, and her ability to raise healthy and normal children alone. Garcia Castro (1993) argued that in some cases the ideology of what it means to be a "complete family" affects women's self-esteem and the way they tend not to give attention to their strengths and other positive elements that have helped them to sustain their families alone. This is particularly true for women who were formerly wives. Those with lower self esteem were found to be more vulnerable both economically and socially because it was considered indispensable to have a man in the household to defend their "honor" and to make people "respect" the house. In many cases, a woman living alone, regardless of her marital status, is an anomaly, and may face discrimination in terms of housing and jobs.

Another premise challenged by this study is that the absence of a father is often seen as the cause of a number of

social maladies like criminality and drug abuse. This study of widowhood shows how children reared by widows may be extremely responsible and motivated to get an education and begin work early. Among the 58 families in the sample, in almost all cases the children of the widows had more education and better positions than their mothers. Women with little or no education who worked as servants or seamstresses have produced medical doctors and other highly paid workers. It was not uncommon for the son of a widow to inherit his father's job in certain professions such as printing, commerce and other trades, and often he had the responsibility to educate his siblings and give his sisters a decent trousseau. This same son often delayed his own marriage or did not marry at all. If he married he may have brought his bride home, and she knew that she eventually would have to take care of her mother-in-law.

In the course of fieldwork I found only one case of criminal behavior among the children of widows. A young man -- one of the sons of a woman whose exemplary husband was murdered by a drunken neighbor -- was in jail for robbery and drug dealing. His mother clearly blamed the misfortune of her son not on the absence of the father, but on dissolute friends and the unsafe neighborhood in which they lived.

Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of Portuguese widows. First, those who are economically and emotionally self-reliant and independent women. They may be younger, have

their own job, business, property or skills. Second, there are widows who are older, and primarily depend on their families for support. And third there are those widows who depend mainly on the state for financial support. They walk a thin line between self-reliance and indigence, a risk that increases with old age, lack of children and family support. The active participation of women has been crucial in the advancement of widows and their personal and social affirmation. However, widows continue to be involved in a wide range of institutions such as inheritance and gender systems, the sexual division of labor and religious ideology.

This study points to many directions for future research. Widowhood studies need to consider the various aspects that shape the lives of widows. In addition to exploring a whole range of emotions, and physical and psychological needs that widows experience, widowhood studies must also consider the impact of family organization, family and inheritance laws, government benefits, religion and culture, all of which condition in different ways the definition and experience of widowhood. Since there is considerable overlap between widowhood and aging, there is a need to focus on a number of issues related to demography and views of old age. More research remains to be done to understand the effects of extended life expectancy and the impact of the welfare state. This task also calls for a comparative perspective in cross-cultural research. In general, it seems that contemporary

Portuguese widows have fewer problems than widows during the *Estado Novo* or at earlier points in history. They are enjoying a longer life with more dignity and skills to solve problems with help from their families and the state.

It is my hope that this study will soon be challenged by new research on widowhood which considers the interconnections between the individual's experience and the wider economic and political aspects that affect widows' daily lives. A better understanding of their situation will lessen their marginalization in society and will help in planning and providing better services for those in need. I hope, as the widows who agreed to tell their tales of love, death and life did, that this study will contribute not only to the theory of widowhood and family, but that it will serve to improve their lives. I have tried to evoke through their words their experiences of courage, faith, self realization, comradeship, and sometimes fear of and anxiety about the future. I have also shown how they actively manipulate the social roles imposed upon them, how they have organized themselves and constantly struggle to achieve dignity and autonomy. Many individual voices have joined to present an image of widowhood and more important, to offer their personal testimonies of death to those who need consolation. I heard a chorus of women who were far from being engulfed in sorrow, not lamenting their woes but singing a constant hopeful line: "serve life, keep yourself busy, and be useful to society." We all hope

that these voices transcend this study and can be heard by those who have experienced the death of a loved one, and by those who are in charge of providing services to them.

APPENDIX 1

TABLE 5

TOTAL NUMBER OF MARRIAGES CELEBRATED
AND DISSOLVED BY YEAR, 1941-1991¹

Year	Total Marriages	Dissolution by Death	by Divorce	by Separation	Total Dissolved
1993	69887	45752	12492	192	58181
1992	68176	47577	12093	229	59670
1991	71808	46856	10619	155	57475
1990	71654	46198	9216	183	55414
1989	73195	43163	9657	195	52820
1988	71098	44191	9022	164	53213
1987	71656	42877	8948	173	51825

¹ Anúarios Estadísticos, INE, 1941-1991

Year	Total Marriages	Dissolution by Death	by Divorce	by Separation	Total Dissolved
1986	69271	42795	8411	165	51206
1985	68461	43313	8988	160	52301
1984	69875	43578	7034	114	50612
1983	74917	42745	7972	---	50717
1982	73660	41283	6770	---	48053
1981	76283	42615	6827	---	49442
1980	72164	41817	5843	---	47660
1979	80141	40022	5866	---	45888
1978	81111	40824	7043	121	47867
1977	91403	41203	7773	87	48976
1976	101885	42363	4875	276	47238
1975	103125	40782	1552	670	42334

Year	Total Marriages	Dissolution by Death	by Divorce	by Separation	Total Dissolved
1974	81762	39831	777	878	40608
1973	84334	38446	604	736	39050
1972	77325	36566	616	749	37182
1971	83438	38867	542	535	39409
1970	81461	35725	509	528	36274
1969	79180	39210	501	583	39711
1968	76553	35395	743	609	36138
1967	78864	35784	722	590	36506
1966	77199	36854	695	577	37549
1965	75483	34243	695	---	34938
1964	73310	33941	678	---	34619
1963	71209	33626	658	---	34284

Year	Total Marriages	Dissolution by Death	by Divorce	by Separation	Total Dissolved
1962	70817	32480	743	---	33223
1961	78199	32024	756	---	32780
1960	69457	31497	749	---	32246
1959	75868	30780	744	---	31524
1958	73096	29475	785	---	30260
1957	71792	32443	811	---	33254
1956	65894	34467	951	---	35418
1955	73076	31035	943	---	31978
1954	69316	30295	1068	---	31363
1953	67304	29060	1068	---	30128
1952	67059	29728	900	---	30628
1951	66689	32332	1223	---	33555

Year	Total Marriages	Dissolution by Death	by Divorce	by Separation	Total Dissolved
1950	65244	31075	956	---	32031
1949	65388	33274	1032	---	34306
1948	64638	31129	1110	---	32239
1947	67486	32000	1109	---	33109
1946	62460	33844	1181	---	35025
1945	61497	32440	976	---	33416
1944	59620	33053	970	---	34023
1943	58455	32639	958	---	33597
1942	58664	33990	748	---	34738
1941	55131	35184	686	---	35870

TABLE 6
MARRIAGES ACCORDING TO PREVIOUS CIVIL STATE 1922-199
 (Raw numbers and percentages)

Year	Total Marriages	Single Men	%	Widowed Men	%	Divorced Men	%	Single Women	%	Widowed Women	%	Divorced Women	%
1993	68176	62438	91.6%	1440	2.1%	4298	6.3%	64356	94.4%	750	1.1%	3070	4.5%
1992	69887	63850	91.3%	1570	2.2%	4467	6.3%	65765	94.1%	913	1.3%	3209	4.6%
1991	71808	65687	91.4%	1613	2.2%	4508	6.2%	67805	94.4%	927	1.3%	3076	4.3%
1990	71654	65718	91.7%	1706	2.4%	4230	5.9%	67753	94.6%	953	1.3%	2948	4.1%
1989	73195	67068	91.6%	1752	2.4%	4375	5.9%	69268	94.7%	1041	1.4%	2886	3.9%
1988	71098	65042	91.4%	1791	2.6%	4265	6%	67221	94.5%	1032	1.5%	2845	4%
1987	71656	65433	91.3%	2016	2.8%	4207	5.9%	67732	94.5%	1141	1.5%	2783	4%
1986	69271	63296	91.3%	1981	2.8%	3994	5.7%	65589	94.6%	1122	1.6%	2560	3.8%
1985	68461	62600	91.4%	2067	3%	3794	5.6%	64938	94.8%	1158	1.7%	2365	3.5%
1984	69875	64068	91.6%	2049	3%	3758	5.4%	66425	95.1%	1165	1.7%	2285	3.2%
1983	74917	69032	92.1%	2167	2.9%	3718	5%	71452	95.3%	1241	1.7%	2224	3%
1982	73660	67668	91.9%	2301	3.1%	3691	5%	70071	95%	1318	1.8%	2271	3.2%
1981	76283	70216	92.1%	2422	3.1%	3645	4.8%	72756	95.4%	1391	1.8%	2136	2.8%
1980	72164	66334	91.9%	2435	3.4%	3395	4.7%	68735	95.2%	1386	1.9%	2043	2.9%
1979	80141	73845	92.1%	2677	3.3%	3619	4.5%	76487	95.4%	1555	1.9%	2099	2.6%
1978	81111	74445	91.8%	2710	3.3%	3956	4.9%	77157	95.1%	1613	2%	2341	2.9%
1977	91403	84213	92.1%	2961	3.3%	4229	4.6%	87166	95.4%	1776	1.9%	2461	2.7%
1976	101885	95503	93.7%	2757	2.7%	3625	3.6%	98246	96.4%	1690	1.7%	1949	1.9%
1975	103125	99029	96.1%	2567	2.5%	1529	1.4%	100807	97.7%	1495	1.6%	823	0.7%
1974	81762	78751	96.3%	2523	3.1%	488	0.6%	80027	97.8%	1401	1.8%	334	0.4%
1973	84334	81069	96.1%	2693	3.2%	572	0.7%	82462	97.7%	1494	1.8%	378	0.5%
1972	77325	74409	96.2%	2438	3.2%	478	0.6%	75585	97.7%	1395	1.8%	345	0.5%
1971	83438	80322	96.3%	2597	3.1%	519	0.6%	81675	97.9%	1414	1.7%	349	0.4%

Year	Total Marriages	Single Men	%	Widowed Men	%	Divorced Men	%	Single Women	%	Widowed Women	%	Divorced Women	%
1943	58455	54410	93%	3527	6.2%	518	0.8%	56385	96.4%	1784	3%	286	0.6%
1942	58664	54809	93.4%	3395	5.8%	460	0.8%	56698	96.6%	1738	3%	228	0.4%
1941	55131	51662	93.7%	3071	5.6%	398	0.7%	53338	96.7%	1532	2.8%	261	0.5%
1940	46618	43559	93.5%	2664	5.7%	395	0.8%	45013	96.6%	1363	2.9%	242	0.5%
1939	48536	45209	93.1%	2860	5.9%	467	1%	46922	96.7%	1362	2.8%	252	0.5%
1938	48847	45518	93.2%	2848	5.8%	481	1%	47245	96.7%	1368	2.8%	234	0.5%
1937	46801	43598	93.2%	2763	5.9%	440	0.9%	45258	96.7%	1322	2.8%	221	0.5%
1936	46526	43350	93.2%	2784	6%	392	0.8%	44934	96.5%	1370	3%	222	0.5%
1935	48908	45632	93.3%	2838	5.8%	438	0.9%	47309	96.7%	1367	2.8%	232	0.5%
1934	47459	44159	93%	2908	6%	392	1%	45872	96.6%	1364	2.9%	223	0.5%
1933	45933	42644	93%	2814	6.2%	375	0.8%	44213	96.5%	1415	3.1%	205	0.4%
1932	45388	42065	92.7%	2957	6.5%	366	0.8%	43734	96.4%	1474	3.2%	180	0.4%
1931	44908	41517	92.4%	3001	6.7%	390	0.7%	43177	96.1%	1516	3.4%	215	0.5%
1930	47746	43698	91.6%	3596	7.5%	452	0.9%	45650	95.6%	1867	3.9%	229	0.5%
1929*	44525	40839	91.7%	3333	7.5%	353	0.8%	42612	95.7%	1705	3.8%	208	0.5%
1925	45550	41446	91%	3680	8.1%	424	0.9%	43144	94.7%	2173	4.8%	233	0.5%
1924	46242	41856	90.5%	3940	8.5%	446	1%	43700	94.5%	2291	5%	251	0.5%
1923	49104	44450	90.5%	4232	8.6%	422	0.9%	46384	94.4%	2487	5.1%	233	0.5%
1922	50043	45061	90%	4553	9.1%	429	0.9%	47136	94.2%	2702	5.4%	205	0.4%

* Numbers not available for 1926, 1927 and 1928

Year	Total Marriages	Single Men	%	Widowed Men	%	Divorced Men	%	Single Women	%	Widowed Women	%	Divorced Women	%
1970	81461	78497	96.4%	2477	3%	487	0.6%	79749	97.9%	1407	1.7%	305	0.4%
1969	79180	76191	96.2%	2499	3.1%	490	0.7%	77464	97.8%	1400	1.8%	316	0.4%
1968	76553	73539	96.1%	2482	3.2%	532	0.7%	74840	97.8%	1374	1.8%	339	0.4%
1967	78864	75750	96%	2568	3.3%	546	0.7%	77140	97.8%	1389	1.8%	335	0.4%
1966	77199	74163	96.1%	2467	3.2%	569	0.7%	75449	97.7%	1375	1.8%	375	0.5%
1965	75483	72441	96%	2453	3.2%	589	0.8%	73807	97.8%	1316	1.7%	360	0.5%
1964	73310	70330	95.9%	2439	3.3%	541	0.8%	71619	97.7%	1328	1.8%	363	0.5%
1963	71209	68234	95.8%	2412	3.4%	563	0.8%	69609	97.8%	1236	1.7%	364	0.5%
1962	70817	67807	95.7%	2428	3.5%	582	0.8%	69113	97.6%	1322	1.9%	382	0.5%
1961	78199	75184	96.1%	2407	3.1%	608	0.7%	76516	97.8%	1323	1.7%	360	0.8%
1960	69457	66583	95.8%	2357	3.5%	517	0.7%	67871	97.7%	1261	1.8%	325	0.5%
1959	75868	72833	96%	2450	3.3%	585	0.7%	74160	97.7%	1333	1.8%	375	0.5%
1958	73096	69913	95.7%	2565	3.5%	618	0.8%	71384	97.7%	1339	1.8%	373	0.5%
1957	71792	68623	95.6%	2579	3.6%	590	0.8%	70045	97.6%	1376	1.9%	371	0.5%
1956	65894	62738	95.3%	2597	3.9%	559	0.8%	64077	97.2%	1497	2.3%	320	0.5%
1955	73076	69667	95.3%	2765	3.8%	644	0.9%	71212	97.5%	1499	2%	365	0.5%
1954	69316	65912	95%	2835	4%	614	1%	67491	97.4%	1529	2.1%	341	0.5%
1953	67304	63682	94.6%	2999	4.5%	623	0.9%	65335	97%	1590	2.4%	379	0.6%
1952	67059	63401	94.5%	3074	4.6%	584	0.9%	64897	96.7%	1778	2.7%	384	0.6%
1951	66689	62984	94.5%	3075	4.6%	630	0.9%	64704	97%	1571	2.4%	414	0.6%
1950	65244	61486	94.2%	3109	4.8%	649	1%	63169	96.8%	1684	2.6%	391	0.6%
1949	65388	61368	93.8%	3308	5.1%	712	1.1%	63184	96.6%	1806	2.8%	398	0.6%
1948	64638	60557	93.7%	3363	5.2%	718	1.1%	62390	96.5%	1884	2.9%	364	0.6%
1947	67486	63363	93.6%	3452	5.4%	671	1%	65275	96.6%	1825	2.8%	386	0.6%
1946	62460	58488	93.7%	3327	5.3%	645	1%	60407	96.7%	1714	2.7%	339	0.6%
1945	61479	57407	93.4%	3407	5.5%	665	1.1%	59365	96.5%	1690	2.7%	424	0.8%
1944	59620	55631	93.3%	3372	5.7%	617	1%	57521	96.4%	1762	3%	337	0.6%

TABLE 7
PERCENTAGES OF MARRIAGES DISSOLVED BY DEATH, 1991-1941

Year	Marriages Dissolved by Death	Death of Husband	%	Death of Wife	%
1991	46856	32790	70%	14066	30%
1990	46198	32044	69.4	14154	30.6
1989	43163	30179	69.9	12984	30.1
1988	44191	30827	69.7	13364	30.3
1987	42877	29767	69.4	13110	30.6
1986	42795	29682	69.4	13113	30.6
1985	43313	29928	69	13385	31
1984	43578	30066	68.9	13512	31.1
1983	42745	29516	69	13229	31
1982	41283	28401	68.7	12882	31.3
1981	42615	29199	68.5	13416	31.5
1980	41817	28557	68.3	13260	31.7
1979	40022	27226	68	12796	32
1978	40824	27810	68.1	13014	31.9
1977	41203	28060	68.1	13143	31.9
1976	42363	28824	68	13539	32

1975	40782	27782	68.1	13000	31.9
1974	39831	26754	67.1	13077	32.9
1973	38446	25770	67	12676	33
1972	36566	24550	67.1	12016	32.9
1971	38867	26036	67	12831	33
1970	35725	23932	67	11833	33
1969	39210	26314	67.1	12896	32.9
1968	35395	23743	67	11652	33
1967	35784	24048	67.2	11736	32.8
1966	36854	24670	67	12184	33
1965	34243	22829	66.7	11414	33.3
1964	33941	22576	66.5	11365	33.5
1963	33626	22381	66.5	11245	33.5
1962	32480	21544	66.3	10936	33.7
1961	32024	21095	65.8	10929	34.2
1960	31497	20759	66	10738	34
1959	30780	20376	66.2	10404	33.8
1958	29475	19361	65.7	10114	34.3
1957	32443	21291	65.6	11152	34.4

1956	34467	22512	65.3	11955	34.7
1955	31035	20135	64.9	10900	35.1
1954	30295	19658	64.9	10637	35.1
1953	29060	18703	64.3	10357	35.7
1952	29728	19138	64.4	10590	35.6
1951	32332	20864	64.5	11468	35.5
1950	31075	19779	63.7	11276	36.3
1949	33274	21133	63.5	12141	36.5
1948	31129	19669	63.2	11460	36.8
1947	32000	20318	63.5	11682	36.5
1946	33844	21659	64	12185	36
1945	32440	20697	63.8	11743	36.2
1944	33053	21133	64	11920	36
1943	32639	20407	62.5	12232	37.5
1942	33990	21085	62	12905	38
1941	35184	21977	62.5	13207	37.5

TABLE 8
PERCENTAGE OF WIDOWS WHO REMARRY ACCORDING TO PREVIOUS
MARITAL STATE OF SPOUSE 1991-1901

Year	Widows Who Remarry	Single men %	Widowed men %	Divorced men %
1993	750	200 27%	364 48%	186 25%
1992	913	264 29%	431 47%	218 23%
1991	927	250 27%	448 48%	229 25%
1990	953	265 27%	473 49%	215 22%
1989	1041	267 25%	526 51%	248 24%
1988	1032	262 25%	535 52%	235 23%
1987	1141	306 27%	596 52%	239 21%
1986	1122	313 28%	585 52%	224 20%
1985	1158	313 27%	626 54%	219 19%
1984	1165	313 27%	619 53%	233 20%
1983	1241	371 30%	608 49%	262 21%
1982	1318	393 30%	681 51%	244 19%
1981	1391	411 30%	711 51%	269 19%
1980	1386	434 31%	706 51%	246 18%
1979	1555	468 30%	764 49%	320 20%
1978	1613	503 31%	783 49%	327 20%
1977	1776	578 33%	837 47%	361 20%
1976	1690	571 34%	801 47%	318 19%
1975	1495	576 39%	787 53%	132 10%
1974	1401	528 38%	818 58%	55 4%
1973	1494	603 40%	821 55%	70 5%
1972	1395	577 41%	769 55%	49 4%
1971	1414	592 42%	765 54%	57 4%
1970	1407	601 43%	750 53%	56 4%
1969	1400	613 44%	728 52%	59 4%
1968	1374	571 42%	749 54%	54 4%
1967	1389	641 46%	688 50%	60 4%
1966	1375	626 46%	677 49%	72 5%
1965	1316	600 46%	657 46%	59 5%
1964	1328	657 49%	611 46%	60 5%
1963	1236	624 50%	570 46%	42 4%
1962	1322	650 49%	616 47%	56 4%
1961	1323	694 52%	551 42%	78 6%
1960	1261	619 49%	582 46%	60 5%
1959	1333	662 50%	609 46%	62 4%
1958	1339	684 51%	605 45%	50 4%
1957	1376	758 55%	558 41%	60 4%
1956	1497	786 53%	640 43%	71 4%

Year	Widows Who Remarry	Single men %	Widowed men %	Divorced men %
1955	1499	797 53%	626 42%	76 5%
1954	1529	834 55%	627 41%	68 4%
1953	1590	877 55%	647 41%	66 4%
1952	1778	1001 56%	708 40%	69 4%
1951	1571	875 56%	630 40%	66 4%
1950	1684	932 56%	681 40%	71 4%
1949	1806	1006 56%	728 40%	72 4%
1948	1884	1043 55%	756 40%	85 5%
1947	1825	1050 57%	707 39%	68 4%
1946	1714	933 54%	717 42%	64 4%
1945	1690	954 56%	667 39%	69 5%
1944	1762	990 56%	696 40%	76 4%
1943	1784	984 55%	750 42%	50 3%
1942	1738	963 55%	747 43%	48 3%
1941	1532	861 56%	624 41%	47 3%
1940	1363	762 56%	549 40%	52 4%
1939	1362	726 53%	594 44%	42 3%
1938	1368	702 51%	613 45%	53 4%
1937	1322	724 54%	551 42%	47 4%
1936	1370	742 54%	575 42%	53 4%
1935	1367	727 53%	583 44%	57 4%
1934	1364	711 52%	602 44%	51 4%
1933	1415	738 52%	633 45%	44 3%
1932	1474	799 54%	620 42%	55 4%
1931	1516	838 55%	640 42%	38 3%
1930	1867	978 52%	835 45%	54 3%
1929	1705	910 53%	740 44%	55 3%
1925*	2173	1231 56%	886 41%	56 3%
1924	2291	1285 56%	950 42%	56 2%
1923	2487	1411 57%	1015 41%	61 2%
1922*	2702	1562 58%	1081 40%	59 2%
1909	1692	1030 61%	662 39%	--- --
1908	1726	1030 60%	696 40%	--- --
1907	1689	1010 60%	679 40%	--- --
1906	1733	1083 62%	650 38%	--- --
1905	1803	1086 60%	717 40%	--- --
1904	1904	1886 62%	724 38%	--- --
1903	1928	1158 60%	770 40%	--- --
1902	2191	1338 61%	853 39%	--- --
1901	2251	1420 63%	831 37%	--- --

* missing information

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE ON WIDOWHOOD IN LISBON

The purpose of this interview is to learn some aspects of the organization of families headed by widows. That is why I would like to obtain socio-economic and other information about kinship, work, health, religion, etc. This information is confidential and your name would not be used in any resulting publication.

Interview date: _____

I. General Information

Birth date: _____ Place _____

Occupation: _____

When single _____ during your marriage _____

after you became a widow _____ now _____

Schooling: _____

Illiterate _____ elementary _____

High school _____ college _____ other _____

Date of your husband's death _____

his age _____

His place of birth _____ occupation _____

Cause of death _____ place of death _____

Was he sick or disabled? _____ how long _____

II. Family and Friends.

How many children did you have?

Number of Children, Gender, Age, Occupation

Are there any children from past marriages?

How many people live in your home?

Gender, Age, Relationship, Economic contribution?

Did you ever live with another widow (mother, sister, etc)?

Do you have household help?

live in _____ live out _____

What kind of support have you received during your widowhood (moral or economical)?

Can you give me a list of these persons?

Relationship, Age, Type of support

Did you have any difficulties with your children or other members of your family after the death of your husband?

Right after or later on?

How did you solve these difficulties?

How many family members live near you?

Relationship, Place of residence, Frequency of contact

What kind of activities do you enjoy together?

eating out _____ movies, theater _____ cultural activities
vacation, holidays _____ other _____

Can you tell me what are your daily activities?

Do you receive visitors? yes _____ no _____ who _____
how often _____

Do you go out? yes _____ no _____

where and with whom do you usually go?

How many female friends do you have? _____

How often do you visit each other? _____

phone each other _____

Do you spend your time with male friends? _____

With couples? _____

How do you consider your relationship with your husband's family?

good _____ bad _____ indifferent _____

How is your children's relationship with your in-laws?

good _____ bad _____ indifferent _____

Do you own a house? yes _____ no _____

If you live in a rented house, how much is your monthly rent?

Other living arrangements: _____

Did you move when your husband died?

yes _____ no _____ why _____

How many times have you moved after your husband died?

Do you belong to:

a club _____ political party _____ social organization
 _____ religious organization _____ other _____

Did you ever hear about widow's organizations?

yes _____ no _____

If you know, why you don't participate? _____

Do you have a hobby? _____

How is your health in general?

III. Finances

When your husband was alive... who was in charge of running the household? _____ Who ran things like:

a. bank accounts _____, did not have a bank account _____

b. who paid the bills?

c. who was in charge of the household budget? _____

When he died...

Did you know how much money, property, etc, he had?
yes _____ no _____

Did you know if he had debts or if someone owed money to him?

How do you think it was your economical situation when he died?
good _____ bad _____ other _____

Did he have life insurance?

Did he have a will? yes _____ no _____

Who runs the finances in your household now: _____

Who decides about family expenses _____ occupation of free time _____

Please tell me what are your sources of income? _____

Other sources (boarders, etc.) _____

Do you have a pension? yes _____ no _____ What kind _____

How long did you have to wait until receiving the first payment _____

Do you receive or received in the past any of the following benefits? a subsidy for death? yes _____ no _____

help with the funeral? yes _____ no _____ other _____

Do you mind telling me what is your monthly income?

less than 45.000\$00 (minimum wage)

between 45.000\$00 and 85.000\$00

between 80.000 and 150.000

between 150.000 and 300.000

more than 300.000\$00

If you have less than 45.000\$00 what things do you need most?

Tell me what is your monthly budget?

What do you do when you don't have enough money?

What did you inherit from your husband? _____

What did your children inherit?

Was there a need to have a property inventory? (only in cases where there is court intervention)

Who is the administrator of your children's property?

Other family members inherited?

When did you divide the property?

Do you have a will? yes ___ no ___

What did you do with your husband's personal things (clothing, books etc.) _____

IV. Your Marriage

How did you meet your husband?

Date of marriage _____ Type of marriage

Did you have a dowry or received a special present from your parents (cash, land, clothes etc.) _____

or/and from your husband or his family? _____

Did you have a trousseau? _____ please describe: _____

Could you describe how was your marriage?

How would you describe your life now as a widow?
the same ___ better ___ worse ___

Did you ever consider remarriage? _____

If you find the ideal person, would you marry again?

yes ___ no ___ why _____

What do you think about the remarriage of widows? _____

Have you dated someone or had a boyfriend after you became a widow? _____

How long do you think a widow has to wait before going out

with a man again? _____

V. Death Rituals

Where is your husband buried? Cemetery _____

How often do you go to the cemetery? _____

Could you describe his funeral? _____

Did he receive a second burial? _____

Who paid the funeral expenses? _____

Before his death, did you have any premonitions? _____

Could you describe the feelings that you had at that time?

How often do you celebrate masses in his honor?

monthly ___ yearly _____

How long did you wear mourning clothes?

months _____ years _____

Did anybody advise you not to use it? _____

What do you think of the widows that do not wear black? _____

and of those who always wear it? _____

How long do you think a woman must wear black and for whom?

husband _____ children _____ mother _____ father _____
siblings _____ other _____

Do you think society treats widows differently? _____

Are you satisfied with the life you lead? yes _____ no _____

VI. Now I am going to read some phrases, please tell me what do you think of them:

a. What does it mean for you the phrase a "merry widow"

b. A widow is frequently forgotten by people she always thought were her friends

- c. A widow is not supposed to participate in social activities
- d. The absence of a man is a serious problem for a widow
- e. A widow that does not show her grief is admired by people
- f. Is too late to begin again and too early to stop living

What do you think is the best prescription for a widow to avoid sad feelings? _____

What kind of advise would you give to a newly widowed woman:

VII. General Opinions

What has been the greatest accomplishment of your life?

How do you think it is or will be your old age?

Have you made any plans for that?

What do you think is the principal problem for elderly people in Portugal?

Are you satisfied with the Social and welfare systems of Portugal?

yes ____ no ____ don't know ____ why ____

Do you think that the revolution of April 25 changed something for widows?

What things are different? _____

And, for women in general?

Do you think that the EEC has something to offer to Portuguese widows?

yes ____ no ____ don't know ____ What things? ____

And, for women in general?

yes ____ no ____ don't know ____ What things? ____

ONLY FOR WIDOWS WHO BELONG TO MEV

How long have you been a member?

How did you first learn about the movement?

What is your function in the movement?

Have you invited other widows to belong to MEV?

How often do you go to meetings?

In what kind of activities do you participate (pilgrimages, etc)?

When was the last time that you participated?

Is your religious life different after you entered the movement?

What kind of help have you received from MEV?

Do you have any negative things to say about MEV?

Your participation has been very important and I greatly appreciate your attention and your time. Are there any comments that you would like to make? Or other things that you think are important and were not covered?

Suggestions?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

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