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Review by
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The edited volume *Distributive Struggle and the Self in the Early Modern Iberian World* by Nikolaus Böttcher, Stefan Rinke and Nino Vallen is an important contribution to a growing body of scholarship on early modern "self-fashioning" within the globalizing/globalized Iberian empire. It presents a wide variety of case studies about processes of self-fashioning within the complex system of assessment and remuneration in a manifold of regions in the Iberian world. The ten contributions in the book cover a broad temporal as well as geographical scope, presenting case studies from both the Spanish and Portuguese empires, focusing on a broad range of actors (men and women, *conversos*, creoles, *indios*, and Hindu merchants) on regions outside the Iberian Peninsula: in Africa, Asia, and the Americas from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Out of the ten chapters, six are written in English and four in Spanish.

The main issue that the volume tackles derives from the question of distributive struggle in the Iberian empires. As the Crowns administered a distribution system of privileges and rewards, individuals under the regal rule of the Iberian empires had to present themselves as worthy of such remunerations. To accomplish this, they had to create an individual narrative that made them worthy in the eyes of the Crown. The selves that these individuals crafted did not appear spontaneously, nor were they just the pure expression of an inner conscious. The different types of sources chosen for the case studies are, in one way or another, all documents in which individuals presented ("fashioned") themselves to the request they were placing. This "particular form of an early modern autobiographical culture" (p.11) spread throughout the Iberian empire, producing a great volume of documentation that, however, did become standardized to an extent. Given the vastness of the Iberian world and the relative uniformity in procedural action it achieved, the edited volume thus speaks to the historiography on the globality and entanglements of the early modern world, as well as to studies on the changing conceptions of self- and personhood in the early modern era.

The reasoning behind the order of the chapters remains unclear, and is decidedly different from the structure of the 2017 workshop this volume originated in. On the one hand, this (dis)order and decentralized approach emphasizes the main thesis of the volume on the ubiquity of certain self-fashioning strategies within the Iberian empire. On the other hand, it hinders the perception of a coherent temporal or geographical narrative.

The differing contributions orbit around several topics. Chapters 3 and 4 by Richard Herzog and Jose Cáceres Mardones respectively deal with indigenous self-fashioning in the Americas. Cáceres Mardones grapples with questions of a decolonization of Peru's history, Andean historicity, and temporality

within Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala's writings. Cáceres Mardones' starting point is *pacha*, understood in the Andean cosmovision as time and space. Guaman Poma's self-fashioning takes place within this concept. By fashioning himself as "the epitome of the 'Indians'" (p. 134), as old and living in poverty, he justifies his proposal for a remaking of the Andean world in favour of its indigenous population —while still accepting the authority of the King. Herzog takes the life and work of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl as an entry point to study broader questions of the self-conceptions of native authors within the political and legal system of New Spain. For Alva Ixtlilxochitl, fashioning a deserving self meant drawing on and embellishing his lineage and knowledge, and incorporating and highlighting indigenous political concepts. Herzog's chapter fits in well with the contributions of Stefan Rinke and Cáceres Mardones, as all three deal not only with individual but also group identities, in which *space* plays an important role.

Through a combination of visual as well as textual sources, Rinke aims to show the "creolization" of the concept and space of America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He argues that the formations of a creole identity were closely tied to space. Creoles began to perceive "America" positively in its own right, as a nexus between the "Old" and the "New" and as an identity-defining element, sometimes in opposition to Iberian ideas and policies.

The contributions by Nino Vallen, Delphine Tempère, and Noelle Richardson reflect the core of the volume. Researching a creole author in New Spain, Spanish agents in the Philippines, and Hindu merchants in the Portuguese Estado da Índia respectively, these contributions present paradigmatic examples of the ways in which imperial subjects fashioned a deserving self for/within the system of assessment and remuneration. In his analysis of Baltasar Dorantes de Carranza's case, Vallen highlights the "inherently relational nature of personhood" (p.165) in the early modern era. Dorantes de Carranza, as a creole, situated himself within a grid of various collectives present in the Americas while exalting himself due to his personal merits. His statements on the inherent nature of the creoles potentially give further insight into a developing creole identity. Mobility emerges as the focal point in Tempère's analysis of legal records produced by Spaniards who were or had been in the Philippines. She shows how these agents of empire highlighted their administrative, military, or religious expertise, and above all their global mobility, to present themselves as subjects protecting a Spanish empire vulnerable at its limits, and therefore deserving of privileges. The article by Richardson strikes a similar note, showcasing how Hindu merchants made use of the legal framework of the Portuguese empire as a crucial element of their commercial strategy. Members of the mercantile

class in the Estado da Índia inserted themselves into the Portuguese colonial distribution system for economic gain, as well as for social positioning and mobility upwards. A picture of mutual dependencies and reciprocities between these merchants and the Crown emerged.

Ingrid Simson's contribution presents similar strategies of the fashioning of a deserving self, albeit in a more unusual type of source: epic poetry. Simson's literary perspective highlights rare examples of the creation of a "deserving self" through non-procedural documents.

Through the use of inquisitorial documentation, Nikolaus Böttcher researched the lives of several *conversos* who constantly moved across confessional lines. These highly mobile individuals were not crafting autobiographies to obtain privileges or royal favors, but did so in a hostile environment, trying to survive religious persecution. This case study is a noticeable exception in the volume, as the individuals in question were not voluntarily tailoring a self as part of the "distributive struggle," but for survival.

(Global) mobility is, unsurprisingly, one of the overarching themes throughout many of the volume's contributions. For (global) historians of the early modern period, this does not come as a major surprise. For those who have not yet plunged themselves into early modern global history, however, there might still be a surprising element in just how mobile some of the early modern biographies were and how the reception of such a trait could be an asset (Tempère) or arise suspicion (Böttcher). The fashioning of a deserving self could also be tied to specific weaknesses, a point which comes up in the contribution by Herzog and is made evident by Agata Bloch's contribution on Portuguese widows in the empire's colonies in Africa, Brazil, and India. Bloch explores how many of these widows portrayed themselves as poor and helpless to evoke the king's pity and receive financial help or special permits.

The remaining chapter by Lilyam Padrón Reyes approaches another long-overlooked group of imperial subjects: *indios* in the Cuban militias. Padrón Reyes studies how these actors used their role in the defense of the empire to try to improve their situation, as they were enduring the hardship of systematic land dispossession. Taking part in the conquest or defense of the empire was an important aspect of the self-fashioning of the imperial subject, as is also touched upon by Simson, Vallen and Tempère.

The framing outlined in the introduction justifies the focus on the fashioning of a deserving self and proposes it can be effectively studied in the context of the negotiations between subject and ruler. The majority of the case studies present a variation on the following mechanism: an imperial subject aspired to obtain a royal favor in the form of financial benefits, titles, and privileges. To back their claim, the actors crafted a narrative where

they had behaved righteously and/or unjustly landed in a challenging situation. The self that they crafted during this act of narration was tailored to maximize their chances of gaining a royal benefit. Furthermore, the narrative served to establish and strengthen their position within society. The structural similarities of the articles strengthen the thesis outlined in the introduction. However, the conclusions do —to an extent— resemble each other. This can (especially when read one after the other, which, admittedly, is not necessarily the way an anthology such as this is usually read) seem repetitive. The actors significatively vary and to a lesser degree the types of source do as well, but the scheme remains. One of the reasons behind this is most likely related to sources. If the procedure was uniform, then the main differences in the cases would probably come from the reaction of the Crown to each petition, and in many cases the documents regarding the fates of the petitions are lost.

Nevertheless, the contributions consistently depict how the struggles to obtain benefits had a lasting impact on the creation of the self. They offer a glimpse on how certain ideas born from the interactions with the Crown poured outside the realm of administrative procedures and diffused in broader intellectual frames. This facet, the question on how the works were received (in cases with broad audiences), will need to be explored by further scholarship. A history of reception would be key to understanding how the fashioning of the self had a lasting impact on the Iberian world, beyond the discussion on the limits of the agency of the subjects.

There are indeed cases where the conclusions interpret the act of crafting a self as a gesture of assertiveness in itself, despite the fact that the documents can only show a fabricated version of a self. Some contributions include a profound discussion of the inherent difficulties of working with official (legal) sources, whereas others do not. It is likely that such a discussion would have exceeded the length of some of these contributions—yet, it could have prevented an over-emphasis on measuring the extent of self-assertion and agency.

Overall, it is remarkable that this single volume is able to gather so many perspectives from various regions distant from each other and spanning three centuries. By reading the whole volume, the reader gets a glimpse on the multiplicity of the early modern Iberian world. Considering the global nature of this Iberian sphere, it is unfortunate that such approach is still not as common. Combining contributions on the Spanish and Portuguese empires into a single volume is another strength of this book. The union between these empires from 1580 to 1640, and the strong entanglements between them overall, should be reason enough to analyze them in conjunction more often.

The volume is a rich overview for scholars interested in the history

of the formation and negotiation of the self during the early modern period, and more specifically in the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The case studies brought together clearly illustrate the thesis that a particular kind of self-fashioning employed by diverse actors in their struggles for distributive justice spread throughout the Iberian world. It is thus a good example of a work that can expand the existent historiography to be more truly global, through showcasing the similarities in procedures between distant, diverse places.