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### **Review / Reseña**

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## **Out of the Shadows: Women and Gender in the Making of the Iberian Empire**

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### *General Critique*

This is an extraordinary collection of interdisciplinary essays in which the editors achieve multiple objectives, though some more completely than others. Using women as subject and gender as mode of analysis, they demonstrate the often obscured influence that women, especially “marginalized and peripheral” women, exercised in shaping empire in the Iberian World. Their stated emphasis on the great mobility

and interconnectivity (or “entangled histories”) of women throughout the Iberian sphere is corroborated by ten authors who study the transatlantic exchange of people, objects and ideas. Their essays contribute to the expansion of works that connect the great “Atlantic divide”—a divide in which metropolitan and colonial historiographies have assumed divergent trajectories. Lastly, many of the essays prove the editors’ point that women’s activities, while seemingly personal, are intimately connected to shaping imperial politics and economy.

Owens’ and Mangan’s skillful selection of scholars for inclusion in this volume is noteworthy. The collection begins with an introduction and two overviews of the current state of women’s and Atlantic studies (Vollendorf and Poska). The rest of the essays are arranged according to the following themes: law, marriage and family (Altman, Mangan, and Gerona); health and healing (Salazar Simarro and Owens, Walker, and Cagle); African women (Brown and Childs). While the first two essays are mostly synthetic, the remaining eight are deeply researched, methodologically innovative, and treat a surprisingly broad range of geographic, temporal and thematic initiatives. In addition, each essay places women and gender front and center in the shaping of Iberia’s empire. Initially the anthology’s seeming “miscellany” might give the reader pause as to how the editors will achieve a cohesive treatment, but, while reading, one quickly realizes that the volume’s diversity is its greatest strength.

The central focus of the volume is that empire shaped gender and women shaped empire. While an elegant argument, it is not unproblematic. At the outset of the volume, the editors claim that “empire shaped gender,” because Iberia transmitted to the New World a unified set of laws and customs, based in part on the *Siete Partidas*. Castilian gendered laws and the Iberian gender ideologies brought to the New World by Spaniards definitely affected some urban colonial women. However, those living in the countryside—indigenous and African women—represented the overwhelming majority of colonial women until mid-eighteenth century. That they shared this “unified set of laws and customs” with urban women is highly questionable. One could say that indigenous

women received a large dose of Iberian gender ideologies through the Christianization process, which caused them a huge demotion in status, but not one that they accepted lightly or even tolerated. It was Christianity that “replaced” powerful indigenous gods and goddesses with a single, all-powerful male god, but only for indigenous women who lived in close proximity to Spanish *asientos* or interior missions. Resistance to the gender norms implicit in Christianization was both clever and widespread. Most indigenous women continued to worship their own goddesses either in secret or by creating synthetic practices. Two authors who would serve best to illustrate these retentions are Irene Silverblatt’s and Susan Kellogg’s groundbreaking works on the indigenous women of the Inca and Aztec Empires (*Moon, Sun and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987; and *Colonial Peru and Law and the Transformation of Aztec Culture, 1500-1700* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995). African women, on the other hand, many of whom worked on plantations in the countryside were untouched by both the *Siete Partidas* and Christianity. In addition, there are several essays in the rest of the volume that are in opposition to the notion of shared “laws and customs.” Gerona, in her essay on Nacogdoche (East Texas), adds at the very end that Spanish laws that benefited women were passed on intergenerationally for 200 years. However, the emphasis here should be on financial gain, as these were business women who stood to benefit from some Iberian laws and customs (those about dowries, wills, and inheritance practices) and not others—certainly not those about chastity, since rampant marital infidelity is the main subject of the essay. Childs’ African women seem totally unaffected by the *Siete Partidas*, as do Cagle’s East Indian women, and in the end, even Walker’s rural Portuguese *curandeira* was not targeted for her gender, but for the superstitious beliefs she held in common with her male counterparts.

Traditionally the definition of “The Atlantic World” has included all communities that share its oceanic shores. Owen and Mangan, however, rework it to mean all Iberian possessions, whether in the Caribbean Sea, on the East Texas borderlands, in the Peruvian highlands or even on the Indian Ocean (Goa). This reviewer applauds their efforts to globalize, but

wonders why they did not invent a more globalized term for this work. Instead of trying to justify fitting it into the narrow confines of the Atlantic World, why not call it “Women of Iberia’s Global Empire” or “Women of Iberia’s Transoceanic Empire.” This is not a semantic argument, but rather one that addresses “ways of thinking.” A more creative, suitable title would have reflected the “way” that Owens and Mangan are “thinking.”

Owens’ and Mangan’s claim that most previous works on women have been about Spanish elites (Queens and nobility), and that their collection will highlight “marginalized and peripheral women” is overstated. A quick review of the works cited by the collection’s various authors proves otherwise. Their bibliographies alone show numerous works on indigenous, African, and mixed race women. Also, as the author of a historical synthesis about sixteenth-century colonial women, published in 2005, this reviewer can attest to the multiplicity of works on peripheral women extant at that time (*Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005). Since that date, publications on subaltern women and gender in the Americas and the wider Atlantic world have burgeoned.

Lastly, the editors assert that the volume’s Ibero-centric focus highlights Spanish and Portuguese expansion into the Atlantic World prior to English exploration. But of the eight essays based on new research, only four fall into this category: Gerona (late eighteenth century), Walker (mid-eighteenth century), Brown (mid-seventeenth to twenty-first centuries) and Childs (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) clearly transcend this temporal scope.

### *Overviews*

In overviews of the current states of women’s and Atlantic studies, Vollendorf and Poska argue that the great historiographical “divide” between Iberia and its colonies obfuscates their “entangled histories.” They call for a re-entanglement of those “parallel worlds” and the development of broader perspectives through the study of women and gender using the

“Atlantic” model. They also seek to elucidate the transoceanic “synergies and mutual influences” that occurred between metropole and colony.

Vollendorf achieves this by focusing on literature, literacy, the discovery of new texts, migrations—especially of religious women, among other subjects. She provides an excellent example of synergistic outcomes in her lengthy treatment of Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz. As a seventeenth-century writer, Sor Juana’s work is clearly shaped by an ongoing exchange between New World experience and Old World philosophy and style. Vollendorf’s search for illustrative themes, however, is a bit weighted on the side of educated, aristocratic and merchant class women, as opposed to the “marginalized and peripheral” women the editors wish to highlight here. In all fairness, she also points out that we are still uncovering numerous texts written by and about women, which she sees as a sign that literacy was more widespread than previously thought and cut across class lines. While she provides some convincing statistics for urban Iberia and comments on the additional importance of aural access to writing there, she seems to gloss over literacy in the colonies. This is puzzling since, in her bibliography, she cites Cruz and Hernández’s *Women’s Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

Poska starts her essay with a fine example of a 13-year old girl from a Galician farming village who travels, in the late eighteenth century, with members of her family, first to La Coruña (the Galician port city), then Montevideo, then on to a military installation called Lujan, and finally to Buenos Aires, where she finally marries at age 21. She underscores the variety of gendered situations the young woman would have experienced as she passed through all these locations within a relatively short period of time. Her point is that women’s roles and gender norms are never static—a point well-taken.

Poska’s additional comments center on the reasons for the divergent trajectories of colonial and metropolitan women’s histories and the need for scholars to abandon paradigms that all but occlude engagement with one another. Since the 1970s, colonial scholars have adhered to a sweeping creolization model that sets Latin America apart as an entity unto itself, while Spanish scholars have been blinded by

contemporary European politics. Her charge that colonial Latin Americanists “rarely, if ever, mention Spain” could not be more accurate. She goes on to suggest future research directions, such as gendered studies of imperial governance and the creation of a “gender frontier” in Latin America, more histories of peninsular women’s economic activities, and broad comparative research that underscores the bi-directional impact of metropole and colonies.

*“New Research”: Law, Marriage and Family*

Altman’s essay, “Spanish Women in the Caribbean, 1493-1540,” concerns the settlement of Hispaniola, and more referentially Puerto Rico. While Spanish women are rarely mentioned in the settlement of the islands, they were present from the beginning and demonstrated great fortitude in their pioneering efforts to “create a stable Spanish society.” While many of the Spanish women who migrated to the islands were elite wives of *encomenderos*, others were concubines and even prostitutes. Inside Spanish households, Spanish, indigenous and African women, along with mestizo children, co-existed side by side. The sources leading to data on households of this early period depend, to a large extent, on archaeological excavations, since the archival documents generally used to study women (e.g. dowries and wills) did not exist. Imperial policy promoted the migration of women and married couples, demanded that Spanish men send for their wives, and even allowed Spanish men to marry indigenous women—marriage being seen as an element of permanence and continuity. Within 20 years of initial settlement, Altman’s demographic statistics on the migration and presence of Spanish women, especially in Santo Domingo and San Juan, showed that their growing numbers eventually created the nucleus of a Hispanic society.

In “Indigenous Women as Mothers in Conquest-Era Peru,” Jane E. Mangan focuses on: (1) the relationship of indigenous mothers to their mestizo children, and (2) the economic status of indigenous women who bore children with Spanish men. Though other colonial Andeanists have ventured into this area—most notably, Maria Emma Mannarelli (*Pecados publicos: la ilegitimidad en Lima, siglo xvii* [Lima: Ediciones Flora Tristán,

1993]), Maria Rowstworowski de Diez Canseco (*Dona Francisca Pizarro: una ilustre mestiza, 1534-1598*), and Kathryn Burns (*Colonial Habits: Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru, 1999*), Mangan undertakes the most systematic study to date of these indigenous women, their Spanish partners and their mestizo children. Though she conducted research in multiple archives, the sources she culled from Seville's *Archivo de Protocolos* is remarkable, not to mention difficult and time-consuming work. She cites numerous examples of indigenous mothers whose children were taken from them by Spanish men to be raised as cultural Spaniards and in the Christian faith. In return, these women received "donations" of silver pesos, land, animals or other goods, or even dowries from their Spanish partners, which gave them economic status and often eventually ended in bequests to their mestizo children. Some women's children remained in Peru, while others were shipped to Spain, never to be seen again. But, indigenous mothers often took pains to maintain knowledge of their children's whereabouts, and to assure that they received whatever they willed to them. Most mothers led lives that combined elements of both Spanish and Andean cultures. Many were very religious, for example, as can be seen from the possessions they left behind in their wills. Also we can see clearly the transatlantic connection, not only in their relationships with men from Spain, but also in the legal and religious instruments they adopted. She does give one example of a woman who was able to keep all three of her *mestiza* daughters and to provide for them by manipulating obligations from their father. Mangan's conclusion is that: "Indigenous mothers played a transatlantic role from within the heart of the Andes." This is a promising start to what this reviewer considers to be an essential and long overdue project.

Carla Gerona's "Women and Kinship in Spanish East Texas at the End of the Eighteenth Century" revolves around the infidelities of Dona Gertrudis de Santos, who had been called before the Spanish governor for having an illicit affair with Philip Nolan, the famed Irish-American horse trader. Her husband, Antonio Leal, had run horses with Nolan over a 10-year period, and when asked what he knew of their affair, he said he was out of town doing business with the Tonkawa. Gerona surmises that Leal

also had relations with indigenous women from among the Wichita and other Native American groups as a way of extending his own kinship ties and cementing business relationships. The Spanish village of Nacogdoches, a trading *entrepot*, was established formally in 1770, but the Spanish settlers had been in the area for almost 100 years. This frontier area shared multiple cultures—French, Spanish, Anglo, and numerous indigenous ones. Intermarriages, especially between Spanish and French elites created powerful extended families that formed regional, political and economic monopolies. Men and women of lesser status formed intercultural sexual relationships (sometimes more than one) to create extensive kinship networks that favored trade in the area. My one criticism of Gerona is that she seems to use the word “kinship” lightly, as though illicit affairs alone can create kinship networks, whether children are born or not. Surely, Gertrudis de Santos, who is in her 50s, will not have a child with Nolan, yet her relationship with him is described as “cementing business.” I have no problem with redefining kinship, especially in fluid frontier settings, but Gerona fails to describe her modifications. Finally the “transatlantic” exchange appears with a citation of Chipman and Joseph (1999), who claim that the East Texas judicial record shows an inter-generational memory of Castilian laws regarding women’s legal rights. That memory was highly selective, however, since the laws they cite revolve around property and inheritance, certainly not marital fidelity. What better laws for business women to “remember” than those that will benefit “business”? My questions: (1) Does this constitute a transatlantic exchange by the late 1770s or is it a highly specific use of certain laws to meet local imperatives? and (2) When do laws stop being “transatlantic” and when do they become integrated into the social fabric of a highly localized and farflung colonial setting?

### *Health and Healing*

In “Cloistered Women in Health Care: The Convent of Jesús María, Mexico City,” Nuria Salazar Simarro and Sarah E. Owens describe the evolution of a conceptionist convent from 1600 to 1700. Like many convents belonging to the calced orders, in both metropole and colonies, its



walls were intended to house elite, Spanish nuns of the black veil. In Mexico and other colonial cities they often owned their own cells (large apartments), and were permitted to bring with them indigenous servants, African slaves, women of mixed descent, and relatives who were ill or of lesser means. In addition, they also took in widows who wished to profess. The convent became a multiethnic community that served as a safe haven for women across race and class. The major focus of the essay, however, is the convent's emphasis on premium health care. With such a diverse population came diverse systems of healing. The nuns spent enormous amounts of money ensuring that Jesús María's residents, both aging nuns and servants, received the best health care available. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the convent occasionally hired *curanderas*, but the professionalization of medicine saw a decline in indigenous and African medical practices. In the seventeenth century, some nuns trained as nurses, while large sums were spent on the best Iberian pharmacies, physicians and surgeons in Mexico City. The convent also emphasized a nutritious diet, some of whose elements were indigenous. Salazar Simarro and Owens claim that the transatlantic exchange also flowed toward the metropole in the form of American foods, such as chocolate, potatoes and tomatoes, but it seems to this reviewer that the new American foods were transmitted to the Old World through other and earlier conduits.

Timothy D. Walker, "The Role and Practices of Female Folkhealers in the Early Modern Portuguese Atlantic World." As Portuguese medical professionalization proceeded from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, *curandeiras* (and *curandeiros*) increasingly came under state and inquisitional scrutiny. Their medicines and practices assumed outdated, anti-Catholic, and even criminal connotations. By instituting official licenses and publishing midwifing manuals that required literacy, the State attempted to eradicate competition from folk healers and to bolster the position of University-educated physicians. In a tandem effort, medical personnel became involved in the Inquisition's lay collaboration against "magical crimes," contributing heavily toward *curandeiras* becoming increasingly suspect and open to inquisitional trials. He uses the

1740s case of Joana Baptista, a once esteemed *curandeira* and midwife, who was arrested, interrogated, tortured and found guilty of “spreading sorcery, superstitious beliefs, and having made a pact with the devil.” The medical establishment’s hope of eliminating the competition by using the Holy Office, however, was foiled as poor people could not afford its services and continued to use those of *curandeiras* and *curandeiros* right into the twenty-first century.

Walker also addresses gender, as he provides national inquisitional statistics that, at first glance, appear to target female *curandeiras* with a 59% trial rate as opposed to a male rate of 41%. Nevertheless, as rationalistic culture took root among Portuguese elites in the eighteenth century, Walker claims that their highest goal was to eradicate superstitious beliefs among the country’s peasant societies and not to target women over men. As far as a transatlantic exchange is concerned, he claims that the metropole brought European popular healing to the colonies, and that even though local indigenous and African healing practices were already present, it was the colonizers who created the “ascendant paradigm,” no matter how small their numbers may have been. This reviewer cannot help but be dubious about Walker’s claim. In Spanish America, metropolitan immigrants were often so few and so completely out of their element that they depended heavily on the local traditions of the people around them. Portuguese colonists were even fewer. Of course, indigenous and African healers tailored their practices to meet the expectations of their European clients, as he suggests, but they still used their own experiences as the operative paradigm. Nevertheless, a hybridized system is still a transatlantic exchange.

Hugh Glenn Cagle, “The Botany of Colonial Medicine: Gender, Authority and History in the Empires of Spain and Portugal.” Cagle’s work is among the most methodologically innovative in the collection. He painstakingly analyzes two texts—Cristovao da Costa’s, “Tratado en loor de las Mugerres...” (1592) and Garcia de Orta’s “Colquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da India” (1563). Da Costa was a reputable Portuguese physician who was ardently interested in global medicinal plants. His essay

is a sample of the misogynist ideologies sweeping across Europe in which women were painted as dishonest and unreliable. Their propensity for lying and lack of discipline barred them from participating effectively in the creation of knowledge about the natural world. As Cagle stated so aptly, “Here was the gendered architecture of an intellectual order laid bare” (174).

Orta was also a university-trained, Portuguese physician who had settled in Goa in 1534, and spent much of his life identifying and delineating the origins, properties and value of medicinal plants from South Asia. In 1563, his findings were published in Goa, and then translated into Latin and Spanish. The book spread rapidly across Europe and eventually made its way to the Americas. Its influence in advancing botanical studies in the Iberian colonies cannot be overestimated. Nevertheless, Cagle analyzes Orta’s “Coloquios” in counterpoint to Da Costa’s essay as a methodological means of teasing out and acknowledging the important work of colonial women in making truth claims about the natural world. His home in Goa was a buzzing botanical workshop where numerous East Indian women came to live and work. It was they, who under the supervision of its manager, Antonia, were responsible for all the intricate operations related to running the workshop. Antonia was a botanical expert in her own right and was absolutely pivotal to the success of Orta’s studies. In contrast to Da Costa’s misogynist agenda, Orta provided one of the very few sources that acknowledged the contributions of his female collaborators, especially those of Antonia, who explicitly authors parts of the *Coloquios* and whose knowledge can be inferred in other parts of the work as well. Cagle closes by emphasizing how important colonial women were to scientific advances and the “profound degree to which colonial science was a creative compromise rather than the unproblematic projection of European procedures overseas.” This statement proves my point about the dubious nature of Walker’s bold assertion that, where popular healing was concerned, it was the colonizers who created the “ascendant paradigm,” no matter how small their numbers may have been.

*African Women*

Ras Michael Brown, "Mother Nganga: Women Experts in the Bantu-Atlantic Spiritual Cultures of the Iberian Atlantic World." Brown employs a superbly productive methodology by using a linguistic and anthropological model to trace changes and continuities in gender and power in Bantu-Atlantic spiritual cultures. Between 1531 and 1866, millions of West-Central Africans (Kongo and Angola) made the horrific passage to the Americas. Among them, a small group of women and men who had extraordinary talents or were spiritual experts became the nucleus for Bantu-inspired religions, such as the *regla de ocho* in Cuba and *candomble* in Brazil.

After describing, in great detail, the underpinnings of West-Central African societies and their spiritual practices, he uses dictionaries and numerous secondary sources to trace changes in the meanings of the titles, *nganga*, *tata*, and *ngudi*, in Brazil and Cuba. He finds that people of West-Central African descent slowly made a transition from spiritual leaders who were called *nganga* (*baganga* pl.) and whose power was connected to motherhood and matrilineal descent (but based on complementarity of male and female) to *tata* (father) and patriarchy. He mostly explores vocabulary changes in the *candomble* houses of Bahia, Brazil from 1690 to the twentieth century. He partly attributes this transition to the Catholic Church where male dominance was essential. This reviewer wonders about the possible influence of indigenous people who also referred to father as *tata*. On the other hand, he claims that the Yoruba-speaking peoples of West Africa went from patriarchy to matriarchy in their spiritual titles and practices. Brown is careful to point out that these are not firm conclusions and emphasizes the need for further research. While the essay's transatlantic component occurs between Africa and the American colonies, the metropole appears to be absent.

Matt D. Child's, "Gendering the African Diaspora in the Iberian Atlantic: Religious Brotherhoods and the *Cabildos de Nación*." In colonial Cuba, Africans and African-descended peoples formed religious brotherhoods and mutual aid societies called *cabildos de nación*—the *nación* being predicated upon a shared regional identity in Africa. The *cabildos* were sites of cultural, social and political interaction, and had their

own houses in Havana where their members could fraternize. Child's historiographical contribution is that the *cabildos* embodied both the "continuity" and "creolization" paradigms, since they retained elements of their African pasts, while also creating new ways to meet the needs of people living in the New World. His case study is based on the West African region known as the Bight of Biafra. Although he traces the Iberian and African roots of these associations and their evolution in Cuba, his central focus is the gendered relations among men and women in Havana's *cabildos de nación*, and the concealed but enormous influence that women held in them. In 1792, an urban code was instituted in Havana that demanded that the *cabildo* houses be relocated outside the city walls. Ensuing legal disputes led to the creation of rich sources that enabled Childs to uncover data, not only about the daily operations and member services of the *cabildos*, but more importantly about the gendered relations inside them. Although women were not permitted to become leaders, they held the right to *voz y voto* equally with men, and often determined the outcome of elections, because they outnumbered male members by a significant margin. They also donated fair sums of money to the institutions and held sway over financial decisions and activities. Their unheralded power became the subject of conflict along gendered lines, as men often protested the outcome of elections and tried to circumscribe women's rights.

Why did women outnumber men in the *cabildos*, and where did they acquire their wealth? Their numbers derived from Havana's large self-manumitted population of free women of color. Female, urban slaves had many more economic opportunities to accumulate money, both before and after acquiring their freedom. By the nineteenth century, the city's population of free women of color had burgeoned. They participated boldly in its urban economy, especially in marketing much-needed goods for lower prices. It was these wealthy women who contributed their money to the *cabildos* in the form of dues, donations and loans. As a result, they determined who the leadership would be, and as Childs concludes, they shaped "the governance, the direction and the goals" of Havana's *cabildos de nación*. The transatlantic exchange implicit in Child's essay assumed a

remarkable, tri-directional flow, over the course of almost four centuries, as people and ideas drifted continually among three continents—Africa, the Americas and Europe.