

an open admission that this might well be stretching the concept of 'Enlightenment' beyond even the generous flexibility allowed by his editor, who completes the volume with a treatment of José da Silva Lisboa's role as the 'Burke of the tropics', full of energetic ambiguities in Brazil. Here there is also discussion of independence, but that is scarcely a dominant theme of this collection, which, of course, cannot deal with the European experience over these 80 years with post-colonialism as a principal leitmotif.

What does come through most persuasively is the reward to be gleaned from comparative study when it is practised judiciously and with due regard to the detailed historical record. It is no coincidence that the work of Derek Beales and John Elliott is frequently cited in the footnotes. As in Elliott's *Empires of the Atlantic World*, the overall claims for this approach are initially voiced in modulated fashion and subsequently vindicated in an accumulating, narrative-driven effect. Mention should also be made of the role of Kenneth J Maxwell, whose influence has ensured a properly full treatment of the Lusophone world here, just as it has acquired a proper place in comparative work by Francisco Bethencourt and Jeremy Adelman as well as Paquette himself. Perhaps the biggest single bonus, however, is the high profile given to Italy, which today has one of the weaker Latin Americanist scholarly communities in Europe and which, from Savoy to Sicily, shows the Mediterranean world to be both as diverse and as unified as that of the Atlantic. It is a traditional reviewer's tic to complete appraisals of edited collections with a nod to their unevenness, and if that is here almost determined by the nature of the subject matter and current scholarly approaches to it, I came away from this set of essays very much hoping that it would form the first of a new series of regular themed and comparative titles in the mould established by Eduardo Posada-Carbó at the London Institute of Latin American Studies in 1995, since when it has become ever clearer that the variety and cogency of a workshop of real quality are never frozen, swapping salience over time and through scholarly transitions.

Queen Mary, University of London

JAMES DUNKERLEY

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John J. Clune Jr., *Cuban Convents in the Age of Enlightened Reform, 1761–1807* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), pp. 131, \$59.95, hb.

In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, among its various campaigns for enlightened reform, the Bourbon crown made efforts to modernise convent life in Cuba. Bourbon officials sought to root out all signs of decadence – the abandonment of the Tridentine-era monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience – and to enforce the rules of enclosure and the common life. In this slim volume, John H. Clune Jr. seeks principally to demonstrate 'that the impact of eighteenth-century convent reform could be far-reaching', because it 'altered the internal dynamics and the external functions and images of the female religious communities of [Havana]' (p. 1). Clune's topic is of inherent interest: why did convent reform – along with other administrative transformations – produce better results on the island of Cuba than elsewhere? His scholarly contribution would have been greater, however, had he pushed his analysis further, produced a more exhaustive comparison of the specificities of the Cuban case, and addressed a broader array of factors in searching for answers to this provocative question.

Using such documentation as official correspondence, published regulations and sermons that he located in the Archivo de Indias, Mexico's National Archives and the archives of the St. Clare and Ursuline orders, Clune diligently traces both the crown's efforts at regulating convents and the resistance with which both the sisters and their families met with such initiatives. *Cuban Convents* is packed with intriguing details about the implications of the reforms and the reasons for their provocation in the four female religious orders operating in Havana, but focussing especially on the Claristas. We learn, for instance, that the Claristas were the most resistant to reform. In 1761, one Commissary general ordered the installation of dense latticework over the iron grilles of the St. Clare's choir to prevent the ongoing disturbances caused when 'signs and courtesies' passed between the nuns in the chamber and their families and friends in the church during services (p. 27). By contrast, 30 years later, the Carmelites were practicing a fairly harsh rule – sick nuns had access to meat stew, but the rest of the community subsisted on 'guisado de abstinencia' (vegetable stew) (p. 75).

Clune asserts that his sole interest is in writing a history of convent reform, and he clearly delineates what he will not address: 'This is not a study of race, slavery, ethnicity, or gender in Cuba or of statecraft in Spain' (p. 1). While there is certainly justification and scope for Clune to focus exclusively on the question of convent reform, he does not provide a rationale for why the omission of such issues as gender and race as they affected convent reform is warranted. Other works addressing diverse aspects of the efficacy and implications of convent reforms, such as Margaret Chowning's *Rebellious Nuns* in the Mexican context and Kathryn Burns' *Colonial Habits* treating Cusco, Peru, recognise that comprehensive examinations of convent reform must address issues of gender, and in Burns' case, race as well.

At least an implicit aspect of the tensions surrounding the issue of Cuban nuns' lax adoption of the rules of seclusion must have involved the social dynamics of gender and race in Cuba, such as Verena Martínez-Alier first set out 20 years ago in *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*. As Spanish America's most lucrative centre of sugar production, African slaves and free people of colour constituted the majority of Cuba's population by the mid-nineteenth century and were a substantial minority in the late eighteenth. Surely this context would have informed attitudes towards such issues as material decadence, social enclosure and chastity held by colonial bureaucrats, Havana families and the nuns themselves. Particularly in the era of the Haitian revolution, as Yvonne Fabella's research addresses, questions of decadence were intimately entwined with anxieties over both gender and race transgression in the Caribbean context. These are matters Clune does not touch on here. He certainly had the space to further develop his approach to the history – the text itself runs to just under 100 pages. Clune tackles his central subject with efficiency, but his brevity means that secondary issues – comparisons of the Cuban experience to that of the broader Spanish colonial context, transformations in the political administration of the island – are handled abruptly.

Despite these shortcomings, scholars of female religiosity and historians of the Bourbon Reforms will find much to engage them here. Clune's study makes a useful contribution to the under-examined religious and political history of eighteenth-century Cuba and the virtually uncharted territory of convent life in the Spanish colonial Caribbean.

Concordia University, Montreal

NORA E. JAFFARY