

Cécile Vidal (ed.), *Une histoire sociale du Nouveau Monde*. Paris: Editions EHESS, 2021. 340 pp. (Paper €24.80)

This collective work explores the process at work in the formation of American colonial societies from the late fifteenth century to the Age of Revolutions. It represents “a renewed interpretation of formation and transformation processes at work in the new American societies” (p. 11), and will interest all social history-oriented scholars due to its innovative willingness to decompartmentalize and open up the traditional geographic areas of colonial American studies. It will no doubt satisfy the expectations of Caribbean specialists as well, thanks to its constant cross referencing as it takes “a comparative approach on a hemispheric scale” (p. 19)—a promise that it fulfills. The central position of the Caribbean as well as its specificities are thus convincingly emphasized. Due to this geographic opening and spatial interconnectedness, North American, Latin American, and Caribbean specialists will all find it of interest, especially since it calls on the full diversity of methods used in each of these spheres. Likewise, this book will appeal to readers keen to investigate social aspects of New World history at large and, indeed, to all those interested in the Americas in the plural.

Cécile Vidal explains their original scientific approach, a thoroughly new rereading and reinterpretation of colonial societies as Ancien Régime societies, and even as Ancien Régime societies that were brought to their inegalitarian climax. She insists on the treatment of historic time through long-term cross-chronologies. Only by taking the long-term view, she convincingly argues, can the founding steps of colonial America be properly accounted for.

Une histoire sociale du Nouveau Monde examines the history of America’s multiethnic societies through the conquest, colonization, and contacts between Native Americans, European colonists, and enslaved Africans. To that end it presents a diverse selection of thematic chapters, often by two or more specialists. “*Migrations et mobilités*,” by François-Joseph Ruggiu and António de Almeida Mendes, is devoted to migratory movements, whether transatlantic or interAmerican, whether voluntary or forced, and the resulting specificities of colonial societies. “*Travail*,” by Cécile Vidal, proposes a comparative assessment of work in the New World before focusing in more detail on plantations and the mines of Potosí. “*Marchés*,” by Manuel Covo and Jean Hébrard, looks into exported goods, trading monopolies, and the duality between oppression and emancipation. In “*Territoire et propriété*,” Cláudia Damasceno Fonseca and Federica Morelli present an interesting analysis of various patterns of ownership, possession, and dispossession, whether factual or rhetorical, thus completing the socioeconomic approach. François-Joseph Ruggiu and Vincent

Cousseau consider families and Charlotte de Castelnau L'Estoile and Aliocha Maldavsky scrutinize religions, interrogating the values at stake, their structures, origins, renewals, and reconfigurations; both themes vividly show how individuals coped within the frames of these “new worlds.”

“*Droit et justice*,” by Marie Houlemare, Aude Argouse, and Dominique Rogers deals with law and justice, assessing how law justified and underpinned the colonial conquest before helping the quest for freedom, both collective and individual—from implementing domination to challenging it. Finally, in “*Ordre social*,” Cécile Vidal and Jean-Frédéric Schaub offer a valuable insight into social order itself, underlining how this was shaped by origins (European societies and the Ancien Régime) and colonial situations (of both colonists and colonized) in the “new” territories: such transversal notions as hierarchy and violence, but also race, are tackled in this essay, once again spanning all three American areas. Pedro Cardim’s brief conclusion, “*Les sociétés coloniales d’Amérique: perspective comparée et interactive*,” usefully retraces the various historiographic traditions that sought to demonstrate “the idiosyncrasies of each and every area” (p. 291), pointing out that in contrast, this volume chooses the unifying approach of “shared analysis” (p. 292) so as to suggest a constructive dialogue between the then-emerging colonial societies.

The interlinking and interconnectedness of all three geographic spaces, in relation to hemispheric, Atlantic, and imperial history, is to be commended, and should pave the way for other comparative studies. The shared authorship of most chapters is particularly interesting, as it calls upon various researchers and their necessarily different fields of expertise to unite them around one topic.

This volume by French-speaking and/or French-based New World historians also offers an engaging perspective on historiography—literally, the writing of history. It is the result of a longstanding intellectual cooperation and a long-term labor of love. Focusing as it does on colonial societies on the move and in the making, *Une histoire sociale du Nouveau Monde* provides insight into the very making of colonial American history.

Sophie Jorrand

Département d’Études du Monde anglophone, Université de la Réunion,
Saint-Denis; Institut d’Histoire des Représentations et des Idées dans les
Modernités, UMR CNRS 5317, Clermont-Ferrand, France
sjorrand@yahoo.fr