that the fraternities were “out of step with the rhythms of Congolese church life,” while a parish leader complained that “the fraternities started right but they have gone off the rails.” In another case, a graduate of the Catholic school said, “the clergy need to bring the fraternities into line” (pp. 163–164). Eventually in 1987, a detailed national fraternity constitution was revised and incorporated. It regulated a wide range of topics, from the fraternities’ responsibilities to conditions for admission, dues, relations to parishes and dioceses, and distribution of mutual aid (p. 164). Meanwhile, fraternity members’ husbands became the associations’ most avid critics, complaining that fraternity activities took women away from home and family. These reforms, regulations, and critiques of urban women’s Catholic fraternities, more than merely religious, represent a struggle to redefine gender relations. Doubtless, the fraternities were founded on Congolese women’s religiosity, as the author points out, but one must not neglect the fact that the fraternities came into existence as a strategy for women to secure mutual support during economic and political disturbance. The fraternities became the places where Congolese women recast their role as women and asserted their autonomy and agency in the male-dominated political and religious realms.

The author utilizes a wide range of primary sources, including official reports and correspondence from missionaries, archives of four female congregations, and government archives in France and Congo. She also uses oral accounts from fraternity women, European and Congolese sisters, Congolese women in France, Congolese laity and clergy, as well as a number of European Catholic missionaries still working in or retired from Congo. Despite the promising and varied source material, the reader finds that the first four chapters of this study are based almost exclusively on the missionaries’ written accounts. Beginning with chapter 5, the author incorporates more diverse sources, ranging from interviews to oral accounts, into her study, and the African voice starts to emerge. However, this treatment left the impression that European missionaries and Africans were telling two separate, mutually independent stories.

Zhijun Ren


Nineteenth-century taverns evoke images of working class male sociability, if not working-class rowdiness — or worse. Did the 1837 rebellion in Upper Canada not start in a tavern? This slim book forces readers to reconsider this stereotype. The painting reproduced on the cover already provides a clue to the book’s main point: it depicts three well-dressed gentlemen (white trousers, vests, high crown hats) enjoying a drink in the yard of a very bucolic establishment overlooking a pretty bay, served by a respectable looking, but fashionably dressed, young woman. No rabble or rowdiness is evident in this 1849 “country tavern near Cobourg.”
Order and decorum had to be preserved not solely because disorder led to losing one’s tavern licence, but also because taverns played a critical role in early Upper Canadian life. By law, taverns had to provide services to all comers at all times of the day and night; they made travel possible by providing food and lodging to travellers and their horses, but also because they were the equivalent of bus stations. Taverns were where one went to find out the stagecoach schedules and to book a seat. Until the 1840s, taverns were often also the focal points of their communities. They provided rudimentary banking services, were places where people went to conduct their business or set up shop temporarily (travelling hairdressers, dress-makers, jewellers, portrait painters, and dentists were among those who welcomed their patrons in the tavern’s parlours), practise their professions (physicians and lawyers), or run the meetings of their organizations. In taverns, sheriffs auctioned seized goods, the coroner held his inquests, the court sat if no hall had yet been erected, and religious congregations conducted their services. Township by-laws were kept at taverns, public notices posted on their doors, and newspapers made available to the patrons, all encouraging discussions of public matters. Ritualized alcohol consumption facilitated many of those interactions.

This multiplicity of functions meant that people from different walks of life rubbed shoulders rather promiscuously in taverns — what mattered to gain access was less rank (or race or sex) than respect for the rules of engagement. Natives and blacks used the services and spaces of the taverns, and, in the case of Natives at least, “race” was more a matter of behaviour and culture than of physical characteristics or pedigree: dressing and behaving like an Englishman made one an Englishman. Blacks, on the other hand, appear to have been expected to be deferent and “know their place.”

Women were an integral part of tavern life. Some taverns were run by women (about 4 per cent of licensees). Most taverns were family businesses, and the family shared the premises with the patrons. The work of women (wives, daughters, sisters, servants) was also indispensable to their functioning: women cooked and cleaned and even mended clothes and laundered. In addition, women, like men, could use the tavern when travelling, to conduct their legitimate business (the author found no evidence of prostitutes plying their trade from taverns), and to socialize with other women, or in mixed groups, in the parlour.

Tavern life was thus subject to unwritten rules that ensured that respectability and respect for the social order were preserved at all times as much as was humanly possible. Space allocation was manipulated to reach this end. In all but the backwoods taverns, different rooms accommodated different categories of patrons with different expectations and carrying out different types of activities. Barrooms and dining areas were open to all, but greater decorum was expected in the latter; upstairs meeting rooms allowed the “better sort” to separate from the hoi polloi downstairs; and parlours could be monopolized by ladies and their company. Principal houses in larger towns provided separate rooms for those who wanted greater privacy.

The book is very good at description, at bringing to life the world of the nineteenth-century tavern, and at demonstrating its importance in the life of their
communities. The first chapter on the physical layout of taverns and on their furnishing is particularly informative. The book is weaker when it moves into theoretical ground. In particular, the author struggles to reconcile women’s presence in taverns with the separate sphere ideology that allegedly constrained their lives in the nineteenth century, and she eventually concludes that this ideology cannot satisfactorily account for the types of interactions she has uncovered. However, she does not provide an alternative explanation. The problem stems in part from an inadequate, and even unstable, definition of “public” — and no definition of “private.” The public sphere is defined mostly in terms of what it was not. It was more than the “classical liberal sphere of politics and the markets” (p. 5). It was not the Habermasian public sphere of private persons coming together to constitute the bourgeois public opinion through rational discourses, because taverns were often the site of irrational behaviour (but so were the sites of the Habermasian public sphere — coffee houses, theatres and operas, salons, and academies witnessed some irrational behaviour too). Neither did taverns embody the public character of organized activities or parades (p. 5). Taverns supported “an informal public life” (p. 5), but what public means here is not explained any further. In addition, the author often uses “spheres” and “spaces” interchangeably. They were not the same thing, as many authors have noted. (See in particular Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” Historical Journal, vol. 36 [1993], pp. 383–414; and Jane Randall, “Women and the Public Sphere,” Gender and History, vol. 11 [November 1999], pp. 475–488.) Women did not step out of their “spheres” when they went to market to shop for their families. Yet the activity took place in a very public space.

The volume does not engage with the extensive literature on the separate sphere ideology, which challenges the paradigm’s theoretical weaknesses and its inability to account for empirical evidence about women’s activities. This literature also suggests alternative ways of understanding the relationship between gender, “spheres,” and spaces. It has long argued that the separate sphere ideology was normative, not descriptive, and that parallel discourses provided women with alternatives (see Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres?”; Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, Public Lives: Women, Family, and Society in Victorian Britain [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004], pp. 234–235; and Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” Journal of American History, vol. 75 [June 1988], pp. 9–39). It has shown that not only did the public/private dichotomy not correspond to the distinction between home and not home, but also that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries — the time covered by the volume — there was no single definition of public or private (see Lawrence E. Klein, “Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure,” Eighteenth-Century Studies, vol. 29, no. 1 [1995], pp. 97–109; Randall, “Women and the Public Sphere”; Jeff Weintraub and Krisham Kumar, eds. Public and Private in Theory and Practice [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997]; Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the
Public Sphere [Boston: MIT Press, 1992]; and Simon Morgan, “‘A Sort of Land debatable’: Female Influence, Civic Virtue and Middle Class Identity, c. 1830–c. 1860,” Women’s History Review, vol. 13, no. 2 [2004], pp.183–209). “Public” could be restricted to anything involving the state — taverns thus would have been public for the reason they were licensed premises — or it could apply to all that was shared or common to society as a whole. This also fitted taverns very well, but this “public” inevitably included women, non-white people, and members of the “lower sort.” It could refer to the sites of social, cultural, and discursive production — in which case the opposite term was not private, but solitary — and again this “public” did not exclude women, although it may have excluded lower-class people or racial minorities. All these definitions account for the tavern life described by the author. Jane Rendall’s conclusion that “[a] single version of the public sphere is insufficient to allow us to understand the complicated variety of ways in which women might identify with communities which stretched far beyond the borders — whatever they were — of home and family“ (“Women and the Public Sphere,” p. 482) fits perfectly here. The British historiography of the “middling sort,” pertinent here because Upper Canadians belonged to this socio-economic strata and because the time frame is almost the same, similarly depicts women engaged in a wide range of gendered activities in public and private spaces, without being deemed out of their “spheres.” (See Nicola Phillips, Women in Business 1700–1850 [Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2006]; Hannah Barker, The Business of Women, Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England, 1760–1830 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006]; Margaret Hunt, The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680–1780 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996]; and Simon Morgan, A Victorian Woman’s Place. Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century [London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007].)

This (long) caveat apart, the book is very informative and contributes significantly to our understanding of Upper-Canadian forms of sociability, community life, non-agricultural economic activities, and communications.

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Chimalpahin’s Conquest is an English translation of a uniquely hybrid colonial text from central Mexico. In the early 1600s the Nahua annalist Domingo Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin transcribed La conquista de México (1552), a widely popular history of the so-called “conquest” of Mexico-