

*Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice.*

Edited by ELIZABETH DORE. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997. Notes. Index. 251 pp. Cloth, \$38.00. Paper, \$18.00.

This collection of essays is a welcome and accessible addition to the literature on gender and politics in Latin America. Comprising papers originally written for a conference organized in 1994 by the Gender and Development Research Group at the University of Portsmouth (UK), *Gender Politics in Latin America* is intended to examine "feminist debates, radical political action, and the relationship between them" (p. 7).

This has resulted in a series of essays written from sharply different perspectives. Although the first three chapters look at different case studies, they draw similar conclusions: despite women's more active participation in paid work and in social movements, women's identities are still based on their roles as mothers and thus do not challenge patriarchal power in the family, the exploitative strength of capitalism, or the male domination of politics. In her contribution on women working in the export "zones" of the Dominican Republic, Sharon McClenaghan finds that such work has not produced a new identity but is an extension of women's reproductive responsibilities. This conclusion is echoed by Ricardo Cicerchia in his chapter on women in the twentieth-century family. Anna M. Fernández Poncela concludes that the impact of women's political participation in socialist Nicaragua is less than the data might suggest, and she emphasizes the "chasm" between the progressive rhetoric of the Sandinistas and the reality of women's lives. For Mexico, Teresa Cubitt and Helen Greenslade note that participation in social movements does not change women's traditional gender roles, and that by highlighting women's but not men's relation to the private sphere, interpretations of women's mobilization may in fact reinforce these roles.

Women's strategies of "going directly to the state" are assessed by Cubitt and Greenslade as well as by Ann Matear. Cubitt and Greenslade suggest that in Mexico the danger of co-optation is a major weakness of this strategy. In her study of Chile, Matear finds that although women's movements were autonomous and successful in creating a relatively powerful women's ministry (SERNAM), these movements are now succumbing to class differences that had been submerged during the long period of opposition to military government.

Of the essays that deal with issues in contemporary social science, the one by Elizabeth Jelin stands out for its thoughtful look at the consequences of linking women's interests and women's human rights issues. Jelin argues for "abandoning the idea that there are natural, transcendental, universal references" for women's rights (p. 79), and specifies several important tensions that exist "between individual and collective rights," between "public responsibilities" and "privacy and intimacy," and between "subjectivities" and "democratization and equity" (pp. 79–80).

Three historical essays on the family (by Elizabeth Dore, Ricardo Cicerchia, and Muriel Nazzari) remind readers how strong patriarchal Latin American institutions and discourses have been, and how well they have adapted to changing economic and ideo-

logical challenges from the colonial period through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Carmen Ramos's review of the implications of a gender perspective for studying Latin American history is crisp and persuasively applied to the case of Mexico in the twentieth century.

The four essays on literature underline Dore's point, made in her introduction, that postmodernism reflects the increasing fragmentation of Latin American society. If Marxism helped create a political unity of the "working class," defined in economic terms, contemporary politics is increasingly a contest of diverse identities, and race, gender, and sexual preference compete with class as foci of solidarity and political mobilization. Jean Franco's chapter shows how queer theory and practice can be subversive, but does not suggest rallying points for political change. How novelist Luisa Valenzuela used imagery that crossed gender boundaries as a weapon of political opposition is explored by Claudine Potvin. Deborah Shaw reviews the arguments for and against self-consciously gendered writing in the works of several contemporary authors, and William Rowe examines themes of the body and shame in the work of Peruvian poet Carmen Olle.

These essays in literary criticism examine the broad question of women's identities in contemporary Latin American writing, but they do not produce the debate on the implications of postmodernism for Marxist gender analysis promised in the editor's introduction. Nanette Redclift's closing chapter, which analyzes how the material and the discursive elements of women's power and powerlessness are linked, does address these issues, but leaves the reader wishing that the other contributors had focused more directly on them.

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*Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America.*

Edited by SCOTT MAINWARING and MATTHEW SOBERG SHUGART. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Tables. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. ix, 493 pp. Cloth, \$64.95. Paper, \$22.95.

A good deal of ink has been spilled recently over the issue of presidentialism versus parliamentarism in Latin America. The debate was begun by Juan Linz, an expert on Spain, and carried forward by Arturo Valenzuela, a specialist on Chile, where the debate over this issue was, in fact, quite vigorous for a time. Now, Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart have weighed in with a heavy volume that, one would hope, would put this issue to rest. Unfortunately, the authors conclude with a call for "more studies" and the promise of another book.

For most Latin Americanists, the institutional issue of presidentialism versus parliamentarism is not of the highest priority. Most scholars in the field tend to focus on Latin America's economic problems, social issues, cultural changes, and foreign relations. When we add political issues to the list, the focus is likely to be on political party